PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 191

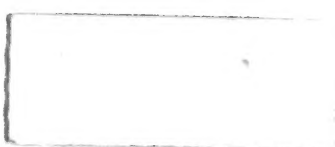
HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1990-91

COMPRISING PERIOD
13 May—23 May 1991



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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 191**

TWELFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 13 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Landfill Gas

1. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of landfill gas schemes in operation or under construction; and what is his assessment of their potential impact on the reduction of the United Kingdom's carbon dioxide emissions.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): My Department is aware of 68 landfill gas schemes in operation, under construction or proposed. With all 68 schemes in operation, and if the gas were used to replace coal, the overall reduction in carbon dioxide emissions would be approximately 1 million tonnes per year.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. Will he remind the nation that carbon dioxide is a killer of all life? Much as I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement, how much more can be done?

Mr. Morgan: What about trees?

Mr. Greenway: Trees, of course, absorb carbon dioxide. Would not more trees be a help?

Mr. Moynihan: If I may, I shall address the important issue that my hon. Friend raised by referring to landfill gas schemes. There are many areas where we can carry out further research and development on environmental matters. Methane is the main component of landfill gas and is 27 times more potent than carbon dioxide. It is therefore important to use the combustion of methane to recover energy. That is beneficial. It removes the methane and disposes of fossil fuels. That is an important environmental step forward and I take on board my hon. Friend's point about other aspects of environmental concern.

2. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives the Government are undertaking to promote the development of landfill gas technology.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has a substantial programme of research and development assistance and technology transfer to promote the use of methane from landfill sites which has led to the continuing commercial exploitation of the technology.

Mr. Lord: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, because what we do with our waste is now of enormous importance and we are looking towards the day when much more of what we discard can be recycled. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, in the meantime, all landfill sites that are to be constructed will be absolutely safe and that there will be no seepage or other emissions from those sites? Will he do that to assure my constituents that they will be absolutely safe? Will he also do all that he can to make maximum use of products like gas from such sites which will prove to be an invaluable contribution to the recycling process?

Mr. Moynihan: Safety is paramount when considering applications for the development of landfill gas sites. Eleven schemes are under construction and 25 are proposed. I assure my hon. Friend that the safety of those schemes is paramount and that many criteria must be satisfied before permission is given.

Alternative Energy

3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current level of departmental expenditure on the promotion of alternative energy sources.

Mr. Moynihan: The expenditure for 1990-91 in support of my Department's substantial research, development and demonstration programme into renewable energy sources was over £20 million.

Mr. Banks: Does the Minister agree that that is an abysmally small amount, given the need to find environmentally clean and safe alternative energy sources? That figure compares most unfavourably with the £40 million or so that the Government spent on advertising the privatisation of electricity—an ideological sop as far as the Government are concerned. The only things that are green about the Government's environmental policy are the mould and moss growing on the good intentions and lack of policy.

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman should know that no Government have done more than this Government to develop sources of renewable energy. We are committed to doing yet more and to working towards 1,000 MW of electricity generation capacity from renewable sources by the year 2000. Over £180 million has already been invested in research, development and demonstration.

Mr. Colvin: Is my hon. Friend aware that the fuel cell is an almost pollution-free source of alternative energy? What is his Department doing to encourage the development of fuel cells? Will he acknowledge that today, the first day of platinum week in London, his Department should promote fuel cells more?

Mr. Moynihan: I assure my hon. Friend that a great deal of money is being spent by the Government, and rightly so, on fuel cell development at Brogborough. I recommended that my hon. Friend sees that project. I know that he is already well aware of it. It is an important two-phase project carried out under the non-fossil fuel obligation and will be the largest landfill gas electricity project in the United Kingdom, generating 9 MW. The fuel cell development and research associated with landfill gas are a key part of our work.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister aware that the efforts of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay to develop alternative energy sources are seriously hampered by the Government's discrimination against Scotland with regard to the non-fossil fuel obligation? Will the hon. Gentleman not treat Scotland in a manner which makes the development of wind, wave and other forms of renewable energy more difficult than in England?

Mr. Moynihan: The Scottish, English and Welsh electricity systems are largely separate and the Government are considering how Scottish generators might contribute to the expansion of generation from renewables in Scotland.

Sir Antony Buck: Is my hon. Friend aware that my grandfather built the last working windmill in this country? Would my hon. Friend like to say a word or two about the potential for wind, which is perhaps not an inappropriate matter for us to discuss in the House?

Mr. Moynihan: Wind energy should concern the House. There is much research and development into the development of wind energy, not least at the wind farm in Wales. It is regrettable that many projects for the wind generation of electricity that come before planning committees often face hostile opposition from the very environmental groups who argue for wind generation around the country. I hope that those environmental groups will take note of the important renewable sources of energy in the United Kingdom, to which wind energy can contribute, and not oppose many planning applications on grounds of aesthetic concern. Indeed, even noise has been an issue that has been put to us in opposition to wind projects.

Mr. Dobson: Must not the Minister agree that the privatisation of electricity is setting back the development of renewable energy because the newly privatised companies are not willing to give long-term contracts? Everything shows that long-term contracts or long-term guarantees for the sale of electricity are necessary if renewable sources such as barrages, windmills or wave power are to be developed on any reasonable scale.

Mr. Moynihan: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assessment. The assumption that contract length has been a constraint on generators seeking to contract within the non-fossil fuel obligation is untrue, because they need the flexibility to offer bankable contracts to sponsors of projects with long pay-back periods. That is why the first tranche of the NFFO was very successful. It is now clear that applications under the second tranche, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, will be considerable.

Nuclear Energy

4. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his current review of the future of the nuclear industry.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): The Government will carry out a full-scale review of the prospects for nuclear power in 1994, taking account of all relevant factors.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. friend agree that the policy of the Opposition parties—of phasing out nuclear civil energy—would be completely disastrous in terms of meeting our international obligations to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases? Does he accept that, in that context, his answer today is disappointing? We run the risk of losing expertise in the nuclear industry if we do not consider and decide how to go forward with the industry before 1994.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the first part of my hon. Friend's question, but I am not sure about the second part. My discussions with people in the nuclear industry suggest to me that they are confident that they will be able to demonstrate that nuclear power is safe and economical. I believe that to be the best safeguard for the long-term future of nuclear power in Britain.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State revert to a previous incarnation and rebuke one of his colleagues as strictly as he did when he was the Government Chief Whip? That colleague should be the Prime Minister who on Thursday used the term nuclear "dumping" in column 823 of *Hansard*. Does not the Prime Minister know that there is no such thing as nuclear dumping? There is careful storage in controlled, safe conditions. The Prime Minister should not have used that word.

Mr. Wakeham: Whatever success I had as Chief Whip in a previous incarnation was as much to do with my relationship with the Prime Minister as with anything else. Therefore, I do not believe that it is my business to comment on something that was said in Parliament last week, when I was in America. I agree with the hon. Gentleman this far—the disposal of the waste from the nuclear industry is an important part of the process of the nuclear industry and, of course, it must be safe and secure. That is a fundamental consideration.

Lofts (Insulation)

5. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the number of homes with accessible lofts whose lofts had been insulated *(a)* in 1978 and *(b)* in 1990.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): In 1978 some 8·7 million homes with accessible lofts had loft insulation. By 1989 the number of homes with loft insulation had risen to 15·3 million. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Mr. Knapman: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that excellent reply. Are low-income families eligible for financial assistance in these matters? If so, how much money will be made available to them this year?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In most cases, investment in energy efficiency equipment or insulation justifies itself financially, but assistance is required for low-income households. I am pleased to say that the home energy efficiency scheme, which was launched in January to give grants to precisely those households, will have a budget of £26 million in the current year.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that the Government's own figures—before they became so embarrassing that the Government stopped publishing them—showed that if the Tory Government had maintained home insulation at the level that they inherited from the previous Labour Government, 5·5 million more homes would now be properly insulated?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. When the Labour party left office, only about 60 per cent. of homes had loft insulation. The figure now is 90 per cent. That shows that Conservative Government is good for energy efficiency.

North Sea

6. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of capital investment in the North sea in 1989 and 1990; and what level he expects it will be in the current year.

Mr. Wakeham: Capital investment in the North sea increased by 30 per cent. from £2·7 billion in 1989 to £3·5 billion in 1990. I expect that rapid growth to continue in 1991.

Dr. Twinn: Given that encouraging answer and the investment announced last week in the Alba field and the Everest Lomond field, does my right hon. Friend agree that production from the North sea continues to provide good news for Scotland and for England, continues to confound the pessimists who talk down the North sea and brings good news for gas and oil consumers in Britain?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right. Last Tuesday I was able to announce the approval of two major new schemes. The Chevron-operated Alba field and the Amoco-operated Everest/Lomond CATS—central area transmission system—project involve investment of £2·4 billion. In total, 11 development projects have been approved so far this year. The total value of new orders placed for goods and services for the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990 rose to a massive £6·2 billion. That is an increase of over 60 per cent. compared with the previous year.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although those figures are most welcome, there is now a grave danger that there will be a concentration of gas power stations on Teesside and, consequently, of power lines that flow from them, and that it is necessary for the Government to have a strategy, so that power stations are located throughout the country and not concentrated in one area and pylons do not all emanate from Teesside? Although the gas fields are near the north-east coast, it is time that we recognised that other parts of the country use electricity and should take their fair share of the environmental problems.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend makes a fair point and I understand his constituency concern, but he would not expect me to comment in detail on those matters because he knows that they are, or will be, subject to planning applications before approval and that all considerations will be properly taken into account when they are received.

Offshore Platforms

7. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the number of new projects being started in United Kingdom yards for the construction of offshore platforms.

Mr. Moynihan: At the present time United Kingdom construction yards have orders valued at £1·6 billion arising from 18 field development projects.

Mr. Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm not only that last year's figure of £6·2 billion for goods and services from North sea oil is a record but that no less than £4·8 billion of that sum was provided by British manufacturing and other British companies? Does he agree that that is a tribute to the vitality of the North sea oil industry and to the efficiency and competitiveness of British industry?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I simply add that that £6·2 billion represented an increase of more than 50 per cent. on the 1989 figure.

Dr. Godman: May I remind the Minister that the Scott Lithgow offshore fabrication yard, which is located in my constituency, is one of the finest of its sort in Scotland? Why are the Minister, his officials and the officials at the offshore supplies office so massively indifferent to the needs of that yard and the labour force in the locality, where the unemployment rate is about 13·5 per cent? Why are the Minister and his officials refusing to assist Scott Lithgow to acquire orders from the North sea oil and gas industries?

Mr. Moynihan: I refute and reject the hon. Gentleman's allegations. The parent company, Trafalgar House, is considering subcontracting work to the yard. I know that Scott Lithgow is actively seeking work. In doing so, it recognises that it is not just a matter of matching orders with yards; it is up to fabricators to decide which orders to bid for and then to be competitive. I am fully aware of the position in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and of the management's determination to seek orders and match them to its capability at the yard.

Sir Anthony Durant: Do not the figures given in answer to this question and the previous one dispel the doom and gloom that was spread some time ago about our running out of oil and gas in the North sea?

Mr. Moynihan: They do. Even better news comes from considering the beginning of the cycle. Last year we had another record for exploration and appraisal wells with 224 sites, beating the previous high of 190 in 1984. The prospects for the North sea are good. We can expect future work for United Kingdom fabricators and suppliers and substantial further production of oil and gas well into the next century.

British Coal

8. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future ownership of the industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Knox: When my right hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Coal to discuss this matter, will he ensure that the views of the miners and others employed by British Coal are considered? Does he agree that privatisation of British Coal will be successful only if it enjoys the support of the employees?

Mr. Wakeham: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. It is extremely important that British Coal employees have an opportunity to participate in the privatisation and that they work to make it a success. I know that the chairman of British Coal would want the same.

Mr. Redmond: The House will be aware of a recent drugs find in Colombian coal imports. When the Secretary of State meets the chairman of British Coal, will he discuss possible ways to stop that transpiring and ensure that the industry's morale is sky high and that there is sufficient coal from British mines to meet our energy needs?

Mr. Wakeham: Colombian coal imports and their prices are matters for the European Commission rather than for me. I certainly want British Coal to be able to compete for as many orders as it can get. It will do that if it can deliver the coal at competitive prices and in a proper manner, and if its productivity continues to improve, as it has in previous years.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that British Coal's success will depend not on who owns it but on its efficiency and productivity? For example, the two Nottinghamshire collieries that have led the production league for the past six months are at Welbeck, on an advancing face with 72 tonnes per man shift, and Thoresby, on a retreating face with 157 tonnes per man shift.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. Following my visits to the coal industry, I have been impressed by the spirit, enthusiasm and skill of those in the industry. The coal industry is making good progress with productivity, which is up by over 90 per cent. from pre-strike levels. However, further productivity gains are essential. The industry has the technology, investment and the skills to achieve those.

Mr. Morgan: I compliment the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) on his moderate question, which was quite unlike the views expressed by Mr. Evans, the Conservative candidate for Monmouth, on any topic mentioned. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that any proposals that he has to privatise the coal industry are not based on the principles that were used to privatise the electricity industry? There were price rises to consumers in south Wales, including Monmouth, of 50 per cent. above inflation and enormous pay rises for the directors of South Wales Electricity of up to 45 per cent., whereas directors of businesses in south Wales, according to a survey in this morning's *Western Mail*, received pay rises of only 2 or 3 per cent., or even pay cuts. The directors of South Wales Electricity are receiving pay rises of £20,000 to £30,000.

Mr. Wakeham: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall not discuss such matters with the chairman of British Coal when I next meet him. If I did so, I should be able to point out that any electricity price rises incurred since the Conservative party has been in office are nothing compared to the 2 per cent. rise every six weeks when the Labour party was in office.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

9. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his assessment of the contribution combined heat and power plant could make to reducing the United Kingdom's carbon dioxide emissions by the end of the decade.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department's most recent estimates indicate that combined heat and power could in time lead to reductions of as much as 5 to 10 per cent. of United Kingdom carbon dioxide emissions. The degree to which this will be realised by the year 2000 will depend on the future development of the United Kingdom power market.

Mr. Rost: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that combined heat and power can make a bigger contribution to reducing global greenhouse gases at a lower cost than any other solution? Is he aware that the Government memoranda to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change estimated that the potential in the United Kingdom was not 4,000 MW but 30,000 MW? Will he now take measures—they are still required—to remove some of the obstacles holding back industrial combined heat and power, particularly the example that I sent to him from Air Products?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I am happy to acknowledge that combined heat and power technology is good for the environment as well as being highly energy efficient. My hon. Friend referred to impediments, but I remind him that the restructuring and privatisation of the electricity supply industry have opened up the market to competitive, alternative, independent suppliers. Indeed, many suppliers of combined heat technology have risen to the challenge.

Mr. Barron: Does the Minister accept that the freeing of the power market means as much as what the Tories stated in 1983 in debates on the Energy Act? It means as much as what was said throughout the debates in the House on the privatisation of the electricity supply industry. The Government still do not recognise the fact that the energy from combined heat and power technology is not competitive with ordinary generated electricity. It is energy used for the benefit of the environment and consumers. When will the Government take the action that the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) mentioned and stop the restrictions still in force against the development of combined heat and power?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any regulatory or administrative restrictions that still exist will be dealt with by my Department and the Office of Electricity Regulation, but the main impediment to the spread of CHP technology in the past has been the state-owned, monolithic structure of the industry, which we have dismantled. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to be known as environmentally aware, he should change his attitude towards what we have done in the electricity supply industry in the past three years.

Renewable Energy

10. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how he proposes to assist renewable energy projects to fulfil the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend proposes to assist renewable projects by requiring the regional electricity companies to contract for renewable generating capacity under a series of additional tranches of the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Speller: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful remarks. Is he aware that the public at large, and young people in particular, have accepted and support the clean, renewable energies of wind, wave and tide? Will Her Majesty's Government consider how they can encourage the use of those resources, which are popular, cheap and infinitely renewable, by the grace of the good Lord?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The most important way in which we can help this year is to make a second order under the non-fossil fuel obligation for renewables, which we shall do. We shall take note of my hon. Friend's important point that we should support not just one or two potential renewable sources, but a whole series, and that we should identify separate tranches of the NFFO.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister will be aware of the widespread support, as the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) said for increasing the proportion of our energy that is produced from renewable sources. However, one inhibition has been the apparent conflict between, for example, a barrage and the conservation interests of wildlife in an estuary, whether it is the Severn or the Usk, Felixstowe on the east coast or the Lyme. Will officials at the Department of Energy put their heads together with officials at the Department of the Environment to try to provide, as a matter of policy, a proper way of evaluating environmental and energy benefits and disbenefits so that we find the best sites for wind, tidal and other alternative sources, rather than having a battle each time a site is chosen? We should have a strategy, not an ad hoc approach.

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify a problem that we faced and, I believe, resolved. That problem highlights the additional need for planning policy guidance to be given by the Government to local authorities so that we avoid the sort of diversity described by the hon. Gentleman. Work is under way on a planning policy guidance note, which will be isssued shortly and will go a long way towards resolving the problem described by the hon. Gentleman.

British Coal

11. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future coal supplies to power stations in the midlands region.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the industry.

Mrs. Heal: Does the Minister agree that the short-sighted policy of the rundown of coal production in the west midlands region has gone so far that it even endangers the future of the power stations in that district? What guarantees will he give that no power stations in the west midlands will be closed, other than Meaford and Ham Hall, whose closure has already been announced?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As the hon. Lady knows, three-year transitional contracts give security of volume and price so that the coal industry can adjust to the new market in energy. The future size of the industry depends on the future size of the market, so it is up to British Coal and all who work in it to create a reputation as a secure and economic supplier of indigenous energy to the electricity supply market. Substantial progress has been made since 1985.

Mr. Dickens: When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Coal to discuss coal supplies to midlands power stations, will he impress on him that as long as miners' jobs and pension funds are secure, it matters not whether coal mines are in state ownership or private ownership? There is no doubt that what the coal mining industry needs for survival is capital input. If businesses—whether Shell or the power companies—put money into the mining industry it will fight off competition from abroad. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. Coal produced by good British pits can compete with coal imported from anywhere. My hon. Friend makes a good point—that the challenges facing the coal industry will be the same, whether it is in public or private ownership.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister accept that productivity in the midlands, west and east has increased at a remarkable rate over the past few years? Following the question of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox), may I put it to the Minister that when the future shape of the industry is being decided it would not be a bad idea if, following discussions with British Coal, the Secretary of State for Energy were to organise a ballot of the workers in the industry so that he might have their view on privatisation before the general election? There would probably be a very clear result against privatisation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I happily acknowledge that the industry has greatly improved its productivity in recent years, albeit from a very low base. Only high productivity can bring security to the industry in the long term. As regards the holding of a ballot, I need say only that we shall be having a general election and that that will show whether people think that the future of the coal industry should be put into private hands.

Nuclear Electric

13. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total electricity output of Nuclear Electric in the year ending 31 March 1991.

Mr. Wakeham: Last year Nuclear Electric plc produced just under 45 terawatt hours. This was a record level of nuclear electricity production in England and Wales. It was also more than 7 per cent. above Nuclear Electric's production target for the year.

Mr. Page: I thank my right hon. Friend for the most encouraging figures that he has just given. Does he agree that it would be beneficial to have a source of energy other than fossil fuels? If we took into account the cost of the effects of sulphur, nitrogen and CO_2 emissions—leaving aside the cost of slag heaps—the real cost of electricity generated by fossil fuels would be seen to make nuclear generation a very cheap option.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the sentiment expressed by my hon. Friend in the first part of his question. In 1994 there will be a full-scale review, which will take account of all the relevant factors. The relative environmental costs of fossil fuels is one factor that we shall want to take into account.

Mains Electricity Supply

15. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on what assistance is available to connect people to the mains electricity supply in remote rural areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the Electricity Act 1989, all new consumers were given the right to connection on reasonable terms. The Director General of Electricity Supply is empowered to adjudicate in cases of dispute.

Mr. Amos: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. He will be aware that recently the Rural Development Commission undertook an inquiry into the matter. May I suggest that he meets the chairman of the commission to discuss ways in which the Government might help it to connect the premises of my constituents in rural areas, or at least to give them some assistance? The advertised costs are quite prohibitive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. My right hon. Friend has been in correspondence with the Rural Development Commission and has pointed out that the position of such customers has been substantially improved. Previously, they had a right to a supply only if they lived within 50 yd of a distribution main; now, the regional electricity companies are obliged to offer reasonable terms for such a supply and the director general can determine what is reasonable in those circumstances.

Electricity Tariffs

16. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will meet the Director General of Electricity Supply to discuss the pricing formula for electricity tariffs.

Mr. Wakeham: Monitoring and enforcement of the price controls in the public electricity licences issued to the regional electricity companies are matters for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. Cohen: Has not the Government's blunder in their inflation calculations last year meant much higher electricity prices than are justified by the rate of inflation this year? Does the Minister agree that the Government have the power, but the people get the bills?

Mr. Wakeham: There is a degree of illogic about the hon. Gentleman's question. He was arguing for higher increases last year as well. That is what would have happened: the total increase would have been more. It is, of course, right that last year inflation to October was forecast at 6 per cent. Unfortunately, it was higher than that and the price increases recently announced take account of that increase in the rate of inflation.

North Sea

18. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current level of capital investment in the North sea.

Mr. Moynihan: As my right hon. Friend noted in response to a similar question earlier, capital investment in the North sea increased by 30 per cent. from £2·7 billion in 1989 to £3·5 billion in 1990. We expect that rapid growth to continue in 1991.

Mr. Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that, as a Shell fellow-elect of the Industry and Parliament Trust, I have been able to see at first hand some of the substantial investment currently going into the North sea? It is good news for the United Kingdom economy. Will my hon. Friend ensure that Treasury Ministers, in so far as he has any influence over them, continue to produce a tax regime favourable for marginal investment in the North sea?

Mr. Moynihan: As my hon. Friend knows full well, the Treasury has for many years recognised that a stable fiscal framework is essential for operators and investors taking

long-term financial decisions in the North sea—a point of which I am sure my colleagues in the Treasury are only too well aware in the context of future decisions.

THE ARTS

London Arts

28. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy towards the arts in the London area; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): The overall aim of our policy for London, as elsewhere, is to continue to develop a climate in which the arts can flourish. To that end, London will have a new regional arts board from 1 October 1991. Good progress has been made with the appointment of Mr. Clive Priestley as chair, 10 of the 14 other board members and a chief executive, Mr. Tim Mason.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome the appointment of Mr. Priestley. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that London is the cultural centre of the world in every aspect of the arts? Will he therefore resist the pressure that has come from the House in recent years to divert money from London to the regions? It is right to build up money for the regions—but not at the expense of London.

Mr. Renton: I agree with my hon. Friend's first point. I regard London as the cultural centre of the world and will do all in my powers to ensure that it remains so. However, it is only right that the regions should have a fair crack of the whip, too. It is true that in recent years more money, on a percentage basis, has gone from the Arts Council to the regions than to London, but I stress that there is no crisis in central Government funding of the arts through the Arts Council. If there is a problem it is down to the London boroughs—individually or through the London boroughs grants scheme—some of which are, alas, withdrawing funding from the arts.

Mr. Fisher: I join the Minister in welcoming Mr. Priestley's appointment, but he faces a difficult task.

The Minister, in his complacency, does not seem to understand the urgency or the scale of the crisis facing London's arts, from which £800,000 has been withdrawn under the London boroughs grants scheme budget. Probably more than £3 million in cuts has been forced on local authorities by the Government's poll tax; and the Government's funding, through the Arts Council, of Greater London Arts is well below the rate of inflation. All that will hit arts bodies in London and it is all a direct result of Government policies.

Does not the Minister see what is going on? Is not he aware of it? Why has he said not a single word while the crisis has been developing over the past few weeks? What will he do about the problem now?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman should not quote from a script passed into his hand by some stagehand whom he has just met. The fact is that I have instructed the Arts Council, through Greater London Arts, to make available short-term funding for those of its clients who may be suffering because of a lack of decisions under the London boroughs grants scheme. The problem lies not in the fact that there is no money in the system. Quite the opposite: there is money in the system, but unfortunately some boroughs have decided that funding the arts is a luxury. The shadow Minister should be using his persuasive powers to persuade the London boroughs to continue to fund the arts through the money that they will have under the LBGS.

Ministerial Visits

29. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he will next make an official visit to the Teesside region to discuss funding of the arts.

Mr. Renton: I am due to visit Tyneside in July for the Museums Association annual conference. I hope that my next visit to the Northern region after that will be to Teesside.

Mr. Holt: Although my right hon. Friend believes that London is the cultural centre of the world, he should learn that Tyneside and Teesside are 50 miles apart and are nothing to do with each other. On Teesside we have a world cultural event every two years—the Cleveland international eisteddfod—which receives little financial backing from the Government. It would perhaps be enhanced if a Minister were to attend. If I told my right hon. Friend that it was to take place in two or three weeks' time, he might say that I was not giving him sufficient notice. However, it will not take place for 18 months, so I hope that I shall not be accused of that and that he will not say that he cannot make commitments 18 months ahead. It is time that the Government showed their commitment to the Teesside region by attending the international eisteddfod, which has a worldwide reputation.

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his lesson in geography. I was aware that Tyneside is different from Teesside, but I thought that I should point out my general commitment to the north-east. He is being somewhat unfair about the Billingham international folklore festival. In recent years it has won six business sponsorship incentive scheme awards, all of which are matched pound for pound by the Department through the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts. He should give credit to my Department for that. I hope to accept his invitation and to be with him at the Billingham festival at some stage in the future.

Art Restoration (Middle East)

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many experts have been given grants for art restoration in the war zones of the middle east.

Mr. Renton: The Office of Arts and Libraries has received no requests for such grants and none has therefore been made.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the policy towards any requests for help that might come from Kuwait? Should not those who, rightly or wrongly, willed the war, which resulted in the destruction of the shrines at Kerbala and Najaf, at least respond favourably if the Shia community ask for help? Can we be prepared for that?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is an experienced enough Member to know that there is little point in asking wholly hypothetical questions. As I said, I have received no such requests for help in restoring, for example, any religious or cultural items that might have been taken from

the museums. If we were to receive such a request, I am sure that the conservation departments of our leading museums would do their best to help. They might make a charge, but that would not be unreasonable. However, they have received no such request, nor do we have any specific information about damage to artistic or cultural objects.

London Arts

31. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will bring forward a plan to remove the arts in London from funding by the London boroughs grants scheme.

Mr. Renton: The problems surrounding the settlement of the LBGS budget this year have demonstrated that the joint local authority arrangements for funding arts organisations in London are not working effectively.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has included those arrangements in the review of the structure of local government. I am discussing with him possible alternative future arrangements to ensure a stable environment for the funding of the capital's arts organisations.

Mr. Bowis: Is my right hon. Friend aware that today Tom Stoppard, Tom Conti and others launched a campaign to save the King's Head theatre, which is one of the best in the capital and in the country, from the disastrous cut in grant by the London boroughs grants scheme? Is not it a fact that that scheme not only knows precious little about the arts, but puts them in the bottom category of its priorities? Is not it time that London's arts were rescued from its clutches?

Mr. Renton: As I said in answer to an earlier question, the difficulty is not that there is no money in the system —there is, from the Arts Council through Greater London Arts and also from the LBGS which, I understand, intends to devote approximately £3 million of its budget, or about 11 per cent., to arts organisations. The problem is——

Mr. Fisher: The Minister is ill-informed.

Mr. Renton: The shadow Minister for the Arts says that I am ill-informed, but he has not read his script. He has been too busy reading *The Stage* and I advise him against that in future. The money is there, in the system. The difficulty is that the LBGS took so long to reach decisions. That is why I had to ask the Arts Council to give interim, temporary help to its clients who were in difficulties.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister must be aware that there is a real crisis of funding in the London arts—in large measure due to the overall financial squeeze that has been placed both by the Government and by the Tory boroughs on the London boroughs grants committee on the funding of voluntary bodies and arts organisations in the capital. It is seriously affecting two theatres in my constituency —the Almeida and the King's Head. Is it not time that the Minister stopped wringing his hands and pretending that he was not responsible for any of that and instead devoted some Government money to supporting the arts in London?

Mr. Renton: I understand why the hon. Gentleman says that because I know of his great interest in the subject. However, he is being less than just. Greater London Arts is giving an award this year to the Almeida theatre of £238,000. That is Government-provided money. Like the hon. Gentleman, I should be sorry if the Almeida, which is one of the most important new writing theatres in the country, went under. It is his council, Islington, and the London boroughs grants scheme which are keeping back £56,000, a mere one fifth of the Arts Council money. The hon. Gentleman should bring his influence to bear on Islington to see that the Almeida does not get into difficulties. Islington is not a Tory borough; I do not think that the Tories are yet in control of Islington.

CIVIL SERVICE

Private Sector Recruitment

34. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what percentage of chief executives and senior managers in executive agencies have been recruited from the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): One objective in appointing chief executives is to get the right person for each job. Open competition is now the presumption. Fourteen of the 50 chief executives appointed so far have come from outside the civil service.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Knowing, as we Conservatives do, that bringing in the private sector or subcontracting agencies to chief executives refreshes parts that socialist policies cannot reach, will my right hon. Friend think about applying those policies to the Passport Office which, at this time of year, is always under great pressure, which causes a great deal of dissatisfaction to people? I am sure that the Passport Office could be far better run if either the chief executive did it or the private sector were brought in to do it.

Mr. Renton: It is likely that, when the present chief executive retires, the next chief executive of the Passport Office will be appointed by open competition, so the best choice will be arrived at from applicants within and outwith the civil service. I spent three happy summers at the Home Office, where I was responsible for the Passport Office, and I should be one of the first to agree with my hon. Friend that some of the best and most efficient private sector methods could be applied to passport offices.

Morale

35. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the civil service unions to discuss morale within the service.

Mr. Renton: I meet civil service trade union representatives from time to time to discuss a variety of issues.

Mr. Fisher: When the Minister next meets representatives from the civil service trade unions, will he tell them whether it is true that the Prime Minister's new policy unit, headed by Ms. Sarah Hogg, is drawing up a secret agenda for selling off large parts of the civil service? Is that the case? What is to be sold off? Will the Minister be sold off as well?

Mr. Renton: If there were a secret agenda, I would not know the answer to the question, would I? The hon.

Gentleman is trying to make castles out of shadows and nightmares. It is perfectly right that the policy unit at No. 10 should look at the further applications of the "next steps" agency process. I was pleased that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor, spoke favourably about the "next steps" process during his speech last week.

We have never said that "next steps", turning a large part of the civil service into agencies, is necessarily the end of the road. It is right that some parts of the civil service should be considered for contractorisation and that other parts should be considered as candidates for privatisation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would support that thesis in the interests of better service for the customer and of a better career structure in the civil service.

Dr. Marek: If there is no secret agenda to privatise large parts of the civil service, should the Government win the next election, why is the Minister planning the abolition of the central rules for staff appraisal and reporting? If he is doing that, can he assure the House that any changes to staff appraisal will be introduced only after meaningful consultation with the trade unions representing civil servants?

Mr. Renton: I have no doubt that there will be close consultation with civil service unions on the subject. If we move to greater flexibility in pay determination within the "next steps" agencies—we want to do that, as has been said many times in discussions about the "next steps" process—it is only right that staff appraisal should also be delegated to a greater extent to the chief executives of the agencies. That will mean that the agencies will not follow a wholly uniform pattern at every stage.

Civil Service College

36. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what courses on the machinery of government are run by the Civil Service college.

Mr. Renton: The college runs over 40 courses a year on machinery of government issues. They benefit greatly from the contribution of Members of the House—including the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for which I am most grateful.

Mr. Banks: It is my pleasure.

Will copies of Sir Bernard Ingham's new book "Kill The Messenger" be made available at the Civil Service college as a teaching aid for civil servants, to show them how to stitch up elected Ministers at the request of the Prime Minister? Perhaps the Minister will tell us that the best thing to do is to cut through it all and appoint card-carrying members of the Conservative party to the chief posts in the civil service?

Mr. Renton: That latter remark was wholly unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. As he has spent time—for which I thanked him—lecturing at the Civil Service college on the value of Question Time, I hoped that he would make better use of his opportunity today. It will not be necessary for us to make available at the Civil Service college copies of Sir Bernard Ingham's memoirs; my impression from reading yesterday's *Sunday Times* is that it will be freely available on the bookstalls.

Women Returners

37. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what arrangements are being made in the civil service to encourage women with children to return to work in Government Departments.

Mr. Renton: Government Departments and agencies have adopted a range of measures designed to enable those women who so choose to return to work in the civil service. They include flexible working arrangements, career breaks and child care provision.

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that, of the items that he listed, the one that needs the greatest encouragement is the adoption of flexible working patterns? That will permit a number of women with children and other family responsibilities to take up a career while abiding by those responsibilities.

Mr. Renton: Yes, I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. When I was responsible for various departments connected to the Home Office, I was aware that recruitment for the department in Croydon was aided by the introduction of flexible working patterns. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the proportion of women now working part time is 13·7 per cent., as opposed to just under 5 per cent. seven years ago. He is right to emphasise the importance of these matters.

Mr. Madden: Will not many women be discouraged from joining the civil service when they consider the unhappy treatment of Colette Bowe in the Westland affair? If the book will not be supplied to the Civil Service college, will the Minister ensure that a video of Sir Bernard Ingham's television interview last night is shown? It was most disturbing to see senior civil servants violently contradicting each other on the Westland affair. One senior civil servant even contradicted a senior Cabinet Minister. Will the Minister institute an inquiry into the Westland affair? It is time that we knew who was telling the truth and who was lying.

Mr. Renton: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's second question is no; I have no intention of instituting an inquiry. As for the first part, I think that he would be the first to complain if we distributed free copies of Sir Bernard Ingham's book, or free copies of the video, to members of the civil service.

European Fast Stream

38. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made with the European fast stream initiative to encourage civil servants to work in the European Community.

Mr. Renton: The European fast stream has attracted more than 4,000 applications this year. We have already allocated more than half the 30 places available.

Mr. Knapman: How long will it be before these fast streamers are working in Brussels? Will they ensure that Britain's interests are even better represented in the European Commission?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that five European fast-streamers are already in post, that the first European fast-streamer was a woman and that 20

places are currently on offer. I intend to ensure that the under-representation of the British in European Community institutions is adjusted in our favour.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister outline the criteria by which his civil servants are chosen to work in Brussels? For example, are they assessed on their views about the United Kingdom's role in the European Community?

Mr. Renton: I shall gladly send the hon. Gentleman some of the documents that are issued to those who apply for such jobs. Those people undergo a thorough and detailed examination. He will be interested to know that on our new joint drive with the Commission, there were more than 12,0000 requests for application forms from graduates from all backgrounds in the United Kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman would like to receive more details about the examination I shall see that he gets them.

"Next Steps" Agencies

39. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps are taken to give executive agencies set up under the "next steps" initiative freedom in the management of the delivery of services to the public and their customers.

Mr. Renton: A fundamental objective of "next steps" is to improve the quality of Government services provided to the public. Agencies are given the managerial freedoms that they need to achieve that.

Mr. Dickens: Many people are concerned that the various Departments will not give enough freedom to the new agencies to manage their own affairs. Is the actual position different from what people think?

Mr. Renton: That is a fair question. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that there are already some good examples of greater freedoms in and better customer service by the existing agencies. He will also be pleased to know that in October we announced that we would ask the efficiency unit to undertake a study of the relationship between individual Departments and their agencies to make certain that we were moving towards giving sufficient freedom. I expect a report of that study to be published shortly.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts in Rear Seats by Adults) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft County Court Remedies Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Adjournment (Spring)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 23 May, do adjourn until Monday 3 June.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

3.33 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I hope that the House will be unashamed of the coming recess, and will not fall for any of the modish comments in some of our tabloid newspapers that the House is doing any less constructive work in the country than it does at Westminster.

As the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) will verify, I have used such opportunities before to raise the question of health services in the county of Shropshire. I did that in the context of the funding and impact of the district general hospital that has been constructed at Telford and its consequences for health care elsewhere in the county. I am returning to the subject because many cottage hospitals in Shropshire have lost their traditional role. That is true of the cottage hospitals in my constituency at Oswestry, Newport, Ellesmere and Market Drayton, and it applies more widely in other parts of the county.

The loss of a cottage hospital within the national health service structure in no sense inhibits local communities from wishing to see those premises being used for a caring role in connection with the work of the NHS and the Department of Social Security. Thus, throughout the county of Shropshire—obviously I speak specifically for my constituency—determined actions have been taken to provide the resources and dedication to enable the cottage hospitals to have a continuing and caring role.

The pattern will, of course, be different from what existed before the creation of the Telford district general hospital, but in some senses it increasingly reflects the consequences of the application of the Griffiths reforms in social services. The change has been a great challenge to the communities who have seen their hospitals alter their traditional roles. Those communities have sought to raise the necessary finances to give the hospitals a prolonged and vigorous life.

A constituent of mine, Mr. T. G. Whippey, of 33 Rowan road, Market Drayton, has circulated a letter to all hon. Members co-signed by Mr. K. Cooper from Newport and Mrs. J. Hodgson from Shifnal. Doubtless they will be interested in this debate.

Mr. Whippey was perhaps taking a line from my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who has said, "We want our money back." My right hon. Friend made that assertion in a totally different context relating to our relationship with the European Community. Mr. Whippey, however, feels that the loss of the cottage hospitals has created a challenge, whereby the resources that they represent should be returned to the communities to which they hitherto belonged.

That point was made in the letter circularised to hon. Members which states:

> "Many localities, especially the rural and isolated, have a very real public transport problem in addition to the humanitarian, and, with the frail elderly in mind, expect to retain these units to continue as prior to 1946"

Mr. Whippey is referring to the inception of the NHS under the National Health Service Act 1946.

Obviously, I do not expect my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to answer the specific point that I shall raise in my short contribution, but I very much hope that he will forward it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. That will supplement the letter that I have already dispatched in that direction.

If one goes far wider than the county of Shropshire, there are many areas where hospital closure has inevitably become part of the recasting of the health service. Those affected want a clear statement on the ownership of those properties under the National Health Service Act 1946.

I suspect that, inevitably, that legislation gives a great deal of discretion as to how the resources realised from hospital closure will be used. In that case, I should like a statement of policy on guidance as to the use of those resources from the Department of Health, the district health authority and the area health authority.

The use of the resources realised by hospital closure runs at the very heart of the conduct of the health service and relates to wider considerations within the social services. It is happening within the context of change, where one is frequently seeking a partnership between the public and private sectors. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be seized of the point that, in the disposal of the assets of cottage hospitals, attention should be paid to enabling equitable help to be given to all the voluntary effort that takes place, to ensure that such hospitals remain in caring service, even if they are not within what was formerly the NHS structure.

It would be advantageous if the 1946 Act was interpreted so that the communities that have been stripped of their NHS hospitals can at least expect partnership finance when those hospitals begin a new and caring role. That is not a theoretical proposition; it is a matter of immediate reality in the county of Shropshire, where the changes subsequent to the establishment of the district general hospital in Telford means that a new role is now being sought—overwhelmingly by voluntary effort—for those buildings that performed the role of cottage hospitals.

I cannot believe that their emerging role, which is intended to be a bridge between social security and the national health service and a variety of other interests—and not least between public and private commitments—does not create the opportunity for guidance to be given to encourage the voluntary work now being undertaken in Shropshire. In that way, we should be able to ensure the maximum care and use of buildings that were once national health service cottage hospitals.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: May I take this opportunity to thank the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) for his brief speech. If others follow his admirable lead, all of them will be called.

3.39 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): There are some who think that this short debate ought to have been timed to take place after the Monmouth by-election on Thursday when, we are told by unidentified Whitehall sources as reported in sections of the press, the Prime Minister will finally decide whether to take the plunge and call a June election. Nevertheless, we are asked by the Leader of the House, who is presumably one of the Ministers said to be counselling against a June election, to assume that the period 23 May to 3 June will be one of

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

parliamentary recess and not of electioneering. If the right hon. Gentleman will confide his thoughts to us today, they should be a most interesting feature of the speech with which he concludes this debate.

There are some important issues that I want very briefly to raise and on which I seek an assurance from the Leader of the House that there will at least be ministerial statements before 23 May. The first is that of the very serious effect of value added tax on charities and, in particular, the cost to the Paterson Institute of Cancer Research in south Manchester.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the recent increase in VAT—which is in effect a poll tax surcharge —means that Britain's charities now have to pay an additional £33 million per annum. This brings their total irrecoverable VAT bill to nearly £250 million a year. Some charities are facing an irrecoverable VAT bill of over £1 million a year.

Most of that money will have been donated by caring individuals to help, not the Billy Bunters of the Treasury, but people who are much less fortunate than themselves. The Chancellor spoke in Monmouth last week about "the mugging of taxpayers." His policy on VAT can be described as the mugging of this country's good samaritans, and in no case is this more apposite than the milking by the Chancellor of funds donated to the Paterson Institute for Cancer Research.

The research done by the institute includes new drug development, the use of growth factors in cancer treatment, bone marrow transplantation, the development of a cancer vaccine and the study of heritability of cancer, as well as basic studies on cancer and its early diagnosis. Professor David Harnden, the distinguished director of this renowned and internationally respected institute, told me before the Budget that this research is funded largely by the Cancer Research Campaign. In order to ensure its continuance, it is now necessary to modernise the institute's building to meet the needs of modern technology and current legislation. This work can be carried out over a period of four years with minimal disruption to the institute's work. The estimated total cost in early March was £8·5 million, including some £1·2 million in VAT.

"The only sources of finance open to me,"
said Professor Harnden,
"are charitable funds."

In a letter to the Chancellor on 4 March, Professor Harnden wrote:

"If you agree with me that the present law is unjust, will you introduce new legislation that will remove the liability for VAT from buildings which are built for a charitable purpose and funded with money which has been donated for that charitable purpose? This might just bring completion of my programme within the bounds of possibility."

Instead of removing the institute's liability to VAT for work which is of life-saving significance, the Chancellor in his Budget increased the burden from 15 to 17·5 per cent. The institute's bill from the Treasury now rises from £1·2 million to £1·4 million, and I am sure most hon. Members will regard that as totally unjust and disgraceful. I wrote to the Chancellor two months ago, in advance of his Budget, and still await a reply. From the Leader of the House, I now seek an assurance that there will at least be a statement from the Chancellor before the House goes into recess.

The second issue I wish to raise is that of the hundreds of redundancies among Dan-Air engineering staff at Manchester airport. They are a skilled work force of very high standing and, unless action is taken quickly to save jobs, they will soon be scattered.

As the Leader of the House must be aware, unemployment in Greater Manchester is already unacceptably high. The total is increasing and, in direct consequence of the Government's policies, it is set to go on increasing. There, more than anywhere else, we just cannot afford the further loss of skills that will result from the policy now being pursued by the Danish company that recently purchased the engineering side of Dan-Air for the purpose, it is argued, of asset stripping. Not only highly skilled engineers, of long experience, but many apprentices are affected by the new owner's decision to disband the present work force at Manchester airport.

At a recent meeting in the House, my right hon. Friends the Members for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), together with my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and I, among others, met a large delegation of the people now facing redundancy. They believe that Ministers have a role to play in helping to save their jobs and representations have been made on their behalf to the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Trade and Industry. We have also had contact with the Danish ambassador and now wish the two Secretaries of State to meet a delegation of concerned right hon. and hon. Members to discuss this still further very serious body blow to skilled employment in Manchester.

The delegation from the work force was concerned that not only employment issues, but also legal questions arise from what has been done by the Danish purchaser from Dan-Air and would very much appreciate all the help and guidance that Ministers can offer. Hence my concern, as the Member most directly involved, since Manchester airport is in my constituency, to secure an urgent ministerial response for them either in the House or in a meeting between the two Secretaries of State and the right hon. and hon. Members who wish to see them. I know that the Leader of the House will want to reply to me about this as constructively as he can.

My third issue, which I shall also raise briefly, is the Government's failure to ratify the UN convention about the rights of the child. The Leader of the House will know that there is strong and increasing pressure for ratification in the interests of Britain's reputation in the world and of needful children, not least sick and disabled children, in the United Kingdom and its dependent territories.

Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have called for ratification without further delay. In doing so, they reflect opinion not only in this country, but among the peoples of Britain's dependencies for whose well-being this House and the Government have ultimate responsibility. If not a debate, there should at least be an early ministerial statement about the Government's intentions before the House goes into recess. That is surely a reasonable request.

The final issue that I want to raise is that of the Government's attitude to NHS patients who were infected with AIDS virus by contaminated blood transfusions, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) has given informed

leadership over a long period. His concern, and that of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, is for the plight of road traffic victims and women who have been infected by blood transfusions during childbirth —among others—who now seek compensation for the grievous harm they suffered during NHS treatment.

Graham Ross, the solicitor who speaks for the lawyers of 14 afflicted patients in the north, has said:

"These are men, women and children who are dying because they were given infected blood. Time is not on their side."

About 170 transfusion patients are thought to be infected, and Graham Ross also says:

"The Government have compensated the haemophiliacs as an act of compassion. I cannot see why that well of compassion should suddenly run dry for transfusion patients whose tragedies are equally real."

His inability to see why patients who suffered the same injury cannot be compensated in the same way is shared not only on both sides of this House, but by people of all persuasions all over Britain. I most strongly urge the Leader of the House to promise a ministerial statement on this profoundly moving issue, about which there is now such mounting public concern, before the motion now before the House is approved.

At the same time, I hope that he will tell us the Government's response to the disclosure by *The Sunday Times* yesterday about patients, not least haemophiliacs, who have been infected with a new and potentially fatal virus, hepatitis C, by blood transfusions. The virus causes liver cancer and kills 700 people in Britain every year. One of those infected is my constituent Peter Mossman, who is a haemophiliac. He is justifiably angry now to have to bear this further burden and also about the Government's refusal to fund a new testing programme at a cost of £10 million. Again, it must surely be reasonable to request an update for the House on the Government's approach to this vitally important issue.

3.51 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I thoroughly endorse the early sentences of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). Although certain elements of the media may imagine that, when the House is in recess, right hon. and hon. Members do nothing but go on holiday, nothing could be further from the truth. All hon. Members must strike a balance between our attendance in the House and our presence among our constituents. Our constituents expect us to be present in our constituencies, an not merely bob up and down on television screens for all to see. I, like the overwhelming majority of right hon. and hon. Members, will go through an intensive period of constituency engagements and activities. It is only right and proper that we should have recesses to give us a greater opportunity to do constituency work than is possible when our attendance in London is so demanding.

I very much appreciate the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) about VAT and charities. All hon. Members are associated with certain charities. The right hon. Gentleman's remarks, although directed at specific charities, can be taken in the general context that any rise in VAT would affect charities. I point out to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that charities have undoubtedly been adversely affected by the rise in VAT. I hope that the Government may yet find some solution to the awful fiscal burden that VAT places on them. I know that my right hon. Friend has sympathy with certain charities.

However, in the House I have often referred to village halls, and will continue to do so. The Finance Bill 1989 —when my right hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was responsible for such matters—did a great deal to alleviate the burden of VAT on village halls. Village halls do much important voluntary work, not only in rural areas such as those which my right hon. Friend and I represent but in urban areas. In 1989, I was surprised and delighted to receive robust support from Opposition Members who represented entirely urban constituencies but who nevertheless had active village halls in their constituencies seeking to raise money for improvements.

As a Member of Parliament from the county of Norfolk, my right hon. Friend will be only too well aware of the enormous sums of money raised to keep historic churches in a proper and proud state of repair. The money has to be raised from somewhere, and VAT must be paid on it. That adds to the burden. I refer my right hon. Friend to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) in the Budget debate. Many of his comments were controversial, but he said that the gap between zero and 17·5 per cent. was perhaps too wide. Sooner or later, the Government will have to come to terms with the fact that the gap between goods and services which are zero-rated and those subject to the single rate of 17·5 per cent. may impose too great a strain on the system. Those are arguments for another day.

As far as I am aware, the main matter about which I wish to speak has not been raised in the House on any occasion. It is exhibitions and exhibition sites in Britain. When we learned history at school, we all learned about the great medieval trade fairs. By and large, such fairs have died out in Britain, although, of course, the small street markets are derived from them. We also have the great national exhibition centres at Earls Court and Olympia in the capital city and the national exhibition centre in Birmingham. But when that provision is contrasted with that in almost all sizeable cities in the rest of continental Europe, one realises that this activity of commerce and trade is paid far too little attention in Britain.

Earls Court and Olympia are aging sites, which will undoubtedly require refurbishment, and that will probably be exceedingly expensive. But we have a few modest exhibition sites in Britain of the type taken for granted in towns and cities of 100,000 people or more in France, Germany and Italy. The trade fairs in those towns and cities attract international trade to the local area and promote the local products. They are almost continuously in session. There is a striking contrast between the number of trade fairs in the cities of Lombardy, Germany or southern France and that in Britain.

We all know about the Ideal Home exhibition, the boat show and the motor show, but there are many opportunities for much smaller trade fairs. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) talked about Manchester airport. The magnet which is most likely to attract trade fairs to Britain is active regional airports. They bring in trade and commerce. There is no doubt that close to airports there are possibilities—if only they can be opened up—to encourage

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trade and commerce through constantly holding exhibitions one after another in the area. Clearly, Manchester is an ideal position in the north-west for holding fairs to encourage such commerce.

There is no doubt that the opening of the new terminal at Stansted opens up opportunities for the east end of London, Essex and East Anglia. It will bring international business, business men and customers into the area via the airport to attend exhibitions held in the area.

A new national exhibition site should be considered for the royal docks area of docklands and the east end of London. The infrastructure is currently being put in place in the area, where there is remarkably little other development. From Stansted airport, it takes little over 25 minutes on an excellent road system to reach the area. In order to have that sort of activity, it is necessary to have not merely transport infrastructure, but hotels, restaurants and all the other facilities which will make the place attractive to international commerce for its trade exhibitions. I stress that I am talking not about a one-off affair which takes place once a year or every other year, but about sites which can be in continuous use, as happens in continental Europe.

There is no reason why nearly every town and city of 100,000-plus people should not have an exhibition site, which can be used for regional, national and international promotions, surrounded by hotel developments and the rest which are needed to make it attractive. In my area, for example, there is no reason why Northampton, Peterborough and Cambridge should not have exhibition centres which can hold such functions. The truth is that they do not. Indeed, they come nowhere near doing so. Yet a city of about 120,000 people on the continent would take such a facility almost for granted.

Why is it that we do not have such facilities? First, for a long period we have allowed our old mediaeval trade fairs to be run down. That has not happened in continental Europe. Secondly, their development falls between the stools of Government, local government and the private sector, which means that they are never properly co-ordinated and allowed to develop. It would simply not be possible to establish any sort of exhibition centre without the closest possible co-operation between the public and private sectors, not merely over planning, but over the whole range of activities. Obviously, I must be careful about how deeply I go into the role of central Government through the Department of the Environment, but clearly national policy should have a pump-priming role.

If we were to establish a national exhibition centre in docklands, which would essentially take over from Earl's Court and Olympia—two aging sites which are unsuitably situated in west London—and rival in terms of size and prestige similar centres in Frankfurt and elsewhere, it would cost at least £300 million. That is a sizeable sum, and it would be wrong to expect it to be raised in any way other than through a co-operative pump-priming venture, involving the public and private sectors and, possibly, the European Community. For a more modest exhibition centre in the towns of Northampton, Peterborough and Cambridge, which I have already mentioned—there are many other examples that one could identify, such as bigger cities, including Bristol, Southampton and Leeds, as well as towns of 150,000 people—the investment would be more modest, but substantial sums would have to be raised.

Some in the private sector are capable of running exhibitions successfully and well, but the facilities simply do not exist in sufficient numbers or across a wide enough area. One of the best ways of promoting regional policy would be to enable such facilities to develop in areas which desperately need investment, especially investment in infrastructure such as I am talking about. That is so important.

There is only one other matter which I wish to mention this afternoon. We are in the early stages of having to develop a national and regional strategy for exhibitions, but it must be done. I am aware of that only because I was privileged enough to enjoy an Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship in the past year or two. For the first time, I had to think about such matters, and I found that there were big gaps.

Although all hon. Members have had a background in industry or professions such as teaching, we all have a narrow background—it could not be otherwise. I came to the House having spent 15 years at the criminal bar among crime and criminals. I always say that some of my best friends are bank robbers—*[Interruption.]* Even the careers of Opposition Members have a narrow base, but we must grow beyond those roots.

The Industry and Parliament Trust enables hon. Members who wish to enjoy its facilities, opportunities and privileges to learn in depth about matters that they have not previously considered. I am grateful for the opportunity that I had. I hope that serious consideration will be given to the recent remarks made by the right hon. and noble Lord Prior, chairman of the trust, about how industry must start to make facilities and arrangements available for those who work for it to spend at least some of their careers in public life. He also spoke of the need for adjustments in pension arrangements, and those important points deserve serious consideration.

Although it is right that we should adjourn, it is also right that we should not do so until we have had the opportunity to raise matters such as those mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Minister and Opposition Members. Once they have been aired in the House, I hope that we shall go off for our Whitsun recess and see our constituents with enthusiasm, and that we shall return renewed by our contact with the real world rather than merely with the gossip of the hothouse that is the Palace of Westminster.

4.7 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Leader of the House will be aware that, on several successive Thursdays, Opposition Members have asked for debates on unemployment. He has continually refused, and I should like to raise the matter before we go into recess. We should have had a major debate on unemployment to enable my hon. Friends to discuss the problems in their areas. We must have one now because, if it is true that we shall have thirteen and a half weeks' recess in July, August, September and part of October, the opportunity for many of us to raise such issues will be reduced. I assume that the reports in the tabloid press are not true and that we shall have more opportunity to discuss the dole queues, not only in relation to the ex-Prime Minister, the right hon.

Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who is shedding tears at having lost one job but who is not on the dole, but in relation to those of our constituents who have lost their jobs.

One thing is certain—unemployment is now a major issue throughout the country. Although some people say that it is now hitting the south and some other regions, it is also hitting the north, Scotland, Wales and parts of the east midlands. In the old coalfield areas, pits and other parts of manufacturing industry are still being closed, despite increased productivity. Unemployment now stretches across the whole country and 69,000 people are unemployed in the south. The service industry has been hit and will continue to be hit until the election and beyond. In districts that we represent in the north and the midlands, many other workers are being thrown on the scrap heap.

Some people talk about unemployment as though the figure were down to 6, 7 or 8 per cent., but we all know that the average figure is about 12 per cent. or more because women who have been in work and have not registered for unemployment benefit should be added. In addition, some miners and others on special schemes are not included in the figure and many young people leave school and go straight on to the Government's slave labour schemes. In total, there are more than 3 million people unemployed at present.

On top of those problems, about three weeks ago I received a letter from constituents in little villages called Pilsley and Stonebroom, where two factories are to close some time in July, with the loss of 180 jobs. I am not talking about a pit or part of the steel or textile industries, which have been hammered in the east midlands and elsewhere throughout Britain—one of those factories is more than 100 years old. The factories have been taken over by a firm called Plaxton's, one of the big three coach manufacturing firms in Britain—the other two are Alexander and Volvo-Leyland.

Plaxton's has taken over the little firms that were manufacturing small buses, mainly for the home market, although they also exported. The Government introduced deregulation and privatised the buses. As a result, many firms are not buying buses and there are now 30-year-old buses trying to move round Britain's roads. Someone in the industry told me that the number plates of some of the buses in London are worth more than the buses. That shows the state of the economy.

Plaxton's took over Reeve Burgess in my constituency and, when the employees assembled in the factory hall the other Thursday, thinking that they were to be praised for massive productivity gains, the gaffer—Matthews of Plaxton's—came along and said, "I am not here to talk about productivity, but to say that the Government's policy of giving aid to buses means that buses are not being bought, so I have got to sack you all."

That was only half the story. The other half is that Plaxton's was also playing fast and loose with the workers at Pilsley and Stonebroom. The owner had another factory at Scarborough, which was not bringing in many orders for its 600 workers. Pilsley and Stonebroom factories were receiving a lot of orders, so the owner decided to "rationalise"—the clever word used nowadays. He thought that he would keep production going at Scarborough by sacrificing the two factories in Derbyshire, with the result that 180 workers will be added to the pile of human misery known as the Tory dole queue.

The Government should intervene in this case, which is nothing short of asset stripping. Why is it that the Government intervene in all sorts of matters when it suits them, but do not do so when 180 workers are to be thrown on the scrap heap, many of whom have worked at the two factories for 30, 40 and, in some cases, 50 years? The Minister has just received a request from the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) to intervene in trade fairs. Why do not the Government do anything about the factories? The Minister says that it is not Government business, but if the coalfield district in which the factories are situated had received the grants of other districts, there is just the possibility that those factories could have survived.

However, the Conservatives do not care about unemployment and never have cared. It is part of their incomes policy to have people queuing up for every job. I am told that, recently, a job vacancy occurred in Huntingdon, the Prime Minister's constituency. Somebody said, "There's a job!" It was a position as a caretaker and people were queuing up for it. That is what unemployment means even in a supposedly plush constituency.

The Government have allowed Rolls-Royce to sack several thousand workers. Their attitude is that they have the whip hand and will give contracts on the understanding that there will be no wage increases, despite inflation of 7, 8 or 9 per cent. Unemployment is a deliberate part of the Government's policy. It is intended to ensure that wage increases are minimised. Thus, 180 people in these two small factories have been thrown out of work, with no possibility of redress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has also been approached by these people, as some of them live in his constituency. He, too, received a petition that was presented to me. Signed by nearly everybody in the villages, it calls on the Government to twist the arm of this fellow, Matthews, the chairman of Plaxton's, in an effort to persuade him to get on with the job of saving the factories so that people will not be thrown out of work.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Plaxton's is a very profitable group. The international edition of the stock exchange year book gives details of its standing. The firm has even taken out a full-page advertisement in that prestigious journal with a view to encouraging people to invest in the area. That confirms what my hon. Friend said—that it is involved in asset-stripping.

Mr. Skinner: There is no doubt about that. Most of the employees have said that the order books were full. Indeed, they expected to be congratulated on having made such a great effort. On going along to the factory, however, they were told that they were about to be sacked, but that the Scarborough jobs would be saved. Those jobs may be safe for a while, but when orders for buses disappear, they, too, will go. Then perhaps Alexander's—one of the other bus manufacturing firms—will go, followed by Volvo-Leyland. It is all part of the Government's policy, but we hope that it will not last much longer. It will certainly cease when the Prime Minister calls a general election.

The Government should do something about such factory closures. What could they do? First, they could encourage firms to start to buy buses. Secondly, some of the buses that are already on the road should be inspected. Many of them are road-unworthy. [HON. MEMBERS:

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"Unroadworthy."] Yes, unroadworthy. Where I come from, some people, if they got mixed up with a big word, used to say, "Chesterfield". There should be proper inspections to ensure that the buses on the streets of every town and city are fit for people to ride in.

It is time to reverse the grants policy so that factories in these areas, including some old coalfield areas, are enabled to carry on.

A short time ago, I called on the Leader of the House to tell the Department of Trade and Industry that, if it really means business, it should meet the workers of these two factories with a view to their setting up a co-operative. What would be wrong with that? The order books are full. If the workers want to set up a co-operative, why should not the Government help them? Why does not the DTI meet people from Reeve Burgess with a view to helping them to take over some of the units at Stonebroom or elsewhere in the constituency? Those people believe that they could do the job better than Plaxton's.

Unemployment is a big issue. Every Opposition Member knows of factory closures and redundancies that are occurring at present. This is not confined to the south. Yes, the south is being hit. The result of the latest by-election showed that thousands of people who thought that they would not be the victims of unemployment now realise what the Tory Government are up to.

We say that it is time the Government changed their policies or got out, so that someone can come to power who will save the jobs of the thousands who have been thrown on the scrap heap, or who may be thrown on it, and so that we can start rebuilding the manufacturing base of Britain once again with a Labour Government.

4.19 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I wish to raise three matters which I believe should be discussed before the House adjourns for the spring recess.

The first concerns my constituent Mr. Andrew Croall, who has been suspended from his position as deputy director of Nottinghamshire county social services department. Having held his position for some time, Mr. Croall was suspended following the programme "After Dark", which went out for three hours after midnight on 9 March. It is alleged that his suspension is not due only to that programme, but it certainly relates in part to it.

During the programme, my constituent made a number of comments rooted in his Christian belief, about abortion and child abuse. I do not agree with either of his comments, but I defend absolutely his right to hold and mention those views. His Christianity cannot be divorced from his professional life: nor should it be. There is widespread concern about the case not only in Nottinghamshire but nationally. It has been covered in a number of national newspapers. The first issue raised by the case is that of freedom of speech for my constituent. The second concerns whether there is a conflict between his beliefs as a Christian and his role as deputy director of social services. Doubtless both matters will be discussed by the county council in its internal inquiry, but I have three points to make about that.

First, the county council must complete its inquiry in the usual way. I accept, of course, that it is not for me as the local Member of Parliament to second-guess what will happen in the inquiry, but the council must complete its inquiry and must be allowed to do so. Secondly, the inquiry must be completed as quickly as possible, not least because this is an extremely expensive post—deputy chief of the social services department. I am concerned that someone in such a senior position should be suspended on full pay while so many challenges and important tasks face him in his department.

Thirdly, because of the intense local interest in this matter and because of the broader issues that it raises, I make it clear that if, at the end of the inquiry, I do not feel that my constituent has received his rights, and if I believe that there has been a breach of natural justice, I shall seek to persuade you, Mr. Speaker, to allow me to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Before the House adjourns, we should also discuss the Audit Commission, whose role I had the good fortune to discuss in an Adjournment debate last month. In that debate I mentioned a number of important areas into which its role could usefully be extended. I hope that the Leader of the House will consider the possibility of a full day's debate on the Audit Commission.

The role of the commission and what it has been doing have never generated greater public interest than now. A tremendous amount of that interest stems from the work that the commission does. A recent article appeared in *Readers Digest*, so I have no doubt that millions of people with bad teeth will be much better informed now about the commission's role. The Audit Commission seeks to promote value for money and quality of service. It also promotes economy, efficiency and effectiveness, primarily in local government and, as from last year, in the National Health Service. But its role is not mainly that of a cost-cutter or cost-saver. It sometimes recommends far greater investment in the services that it examines. One need think only of the maintenance backlog in council housing and hospitals, dealt with by the commission, to remember its specific recommendation of greater investment.

A similar conclusion was drawn from the Audit Commission's work on the police fingerprinting service, so there is no suggestion that it is merely an aim of central Government to try to cut local government spending. The commission seeks to ensure that money is spent in the best interests of the people who are paying for it—local people who pay through local and central Government taxation.

Secondly, the Audit Commission is clearly independent. Eight studies have considered the effect of ministerial directives and guidance on local government. Such work is as painful for central Government as the work that is directed towards local government can be for those who run local services. Included in those eight studies were community care, capital control, homelessness and food safety legislation. The work carried out by the Audit Commission on those wide-ranging subjects is extremely important and needs wider understanding and coverage in the House for the benefit of the broad mass of the population and for the taxpayers who pay for the services that the Audit Commission examines.

"Quality exchange" has been developed by the Audit Commission to consider performance measuring. I hope that the Audit Commission will extend quality exchange and develop quality measures in the national health service as an extension of the role given to it last year in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. There needs to be greater emphasis on management

processes and on the need to adapt work to local circumstances. I am sure that the commission could do that.

Potential savings already identified by the commission are approximately £4·2 billion, but that is perhaps not the most important aspect. Much more important are the value improvements that it identifies and opportunities to save £1,300 million each year have already been identified. The measure of the success of that work is that approximately £662 million of the value improvements have been achieved based on the actions taken by local authorities and based on the local auditor's advice. That means that value-for-money work in local authorities has achieved savings of about 40 times the cost of the work undertaken by the commission. That is a good payback for the taxpayer and the charge payer on the work carried out by the commission.

Two significant independent academic studies of the work undertaken by the commission have been published. One was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust and was called "Inspecting the Inspectorates". The main conclusion of the report was that from all the case studies carried out by the trust, the Audit Commission emerged as the only one of the three inspectorates involved whose reports made an impact on the corporate decision-making process of local authorities. That is an extremely significant finding.

There are three points with which I shall end my consideration of the commission. There is a range of activities in which the expertise of the Audit Commission will be extremely helpful in achieving better value for money, such as the courts. There is plenty of evidence that the money spent on the courts is not best spent. There is an accounting black hole in the way in which we judge how money is spent on the courts which could be dealt with by the skills of the Audit Commission.

Secondly, opted-out schools may have valuable lessons to teach schools that have not yet decided to opt out. The commission's skills could also be valuably deployed in connection with housing associations. It is the Government's declared objective—which I strongly support—to increase the role of housing associations in the provision of public housing and to diminish the role of councils. It is important to involve the commission's skills in housing associations so that they may advertise widely the best practice within housing associations to other providers of public body housing while trying to eliminate some of the worst practices.

Another area is the Metropolitan police. The Audit Commission looks at all the other police forces in the country, but not at the Met. I am sure that I am not alone in the House in suspecting that the skills of the Audit Commission, which are deployed so successfully in the provincial police forces, could usefully be deployed in the Met, too. I am sure that no one believes that the Met is more efficient than the forces outside London. It would be valuable progress if the Audit Commission examined the Met as well.

Last weekend, the Prime Minister made an excellent speech in Perth in which he developed his theme for a citizens' charter empowering individuals to get the best out of public services. There is no doubt that the Audit Commission could be a most valuable executive arm for the individual citizen in seeking the best out of local services. The Audit Commission has the grasp, the understanding and the information locally, and its role in developing the concept of the citizen's charter is extremely important. I very much hope that the Government will consider in an open way how the skills of the Audit Commission can be used in that respect.

I am deeply disappointed by the Labour party's plans to set up a quality commission which would emasculate the Audit Commission. Such a move would directly transfer power away from the consumer and the user of the services back to the providers. It would have a bad effect on the work of the Audit Commission and would mean that it could never again be as tough with those who do not provide good value for money as it has been. More importantly, the proposal shows that the Labour party has learnt nothing from the past 12 years or from the past eight years' work of the Audit Commission, which has done so much to promote value for money in local services. I very much hope that the Labour party will reconsider its stance on the future of the Audit Commission.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose——*

Mr. Mitchell: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Godman: No.

Mr. Mitchell: I thought that the hon. Gentleman sought to intervene.

Dr. Godman: No.

Mr. Mitchell: I now realise that it was his keenness to follow me.

I want to make a final point——

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): The final point?

Mr. Mitchell: I want to make the final point in this section of my speech about the £20 billion Arthur Daley promise made by the Leader of the Opposition last week. It must be a matter of intense irritation and annoyance to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, that whenever he has tried to get across the point that the Labour party will not allow resources to be put into public spending until the additional resources earned permit, the Leader of the Opposition immediately announces that he is pre-empting all the spending of any extra money available.

The truth is that, when the Leader of the Opposition spoke last week, he pre-empted all of any growth that might be achieved during the term of office of a next Labour Government over five years. That seems to be the economics of Arthur Daley. I thought that it was common practice among all parties that one should not promise to spend money until one has it, but that point does not appear to register with the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition also showed an unbalanced approach to public spending.

Mr. Skinner: The Tory Government are borrowing again.

Mr. Mitchell: Instead of deciding either to repay some of the borrowing, as suggested by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), or that the tax take should be diminished for the least well-off, the Leader of the Opposition appears to have pre-empted all that and to

[Mr. Mitchell]

have said that the whole £20 billion, a figure no doubt plucked from the air, should be put into additional spending on services. I am amazed by that.

It appears that no lesson has been drawn from the fact that higher spending and higher taxation of the well-off diminish the income of the Exchequer. That is the lesson of the past five years and the lesson from the United States, yet the Labour party persists in believing against all the odds that additionally taxing and soaking the rich will lead to an increase in revenue for the Exchequer. Clearly, that is not true.

If one accepts that the Labour party has learnt some lessons from the early 1980s about the loony left and about the difficulties that it has presented in terms of elections, one is still left with the fact that Labour appears to have learnt little about taxation since the 1960s and the early 1970s.

In 1964, Harold Wilson, now Lord Wilson, said:

"Over the period of a Parliament I believe we can carry out our spending programme without any general increase in taxation".

What actually happened was that, between 1964 and 1970, the tax burden on the British people increased by £3,000 million—the equivalent of £3 10s a week for every family, worth £50 a week in current values.

In 1966, Lord Callaghan said:

"I do not foresee the need for severe increases in taxation".

What happened between 1974 and 1979? The basic rate of tax rose by 5p, from 30p to 35p. Personal allowances were cut in real terms, bringing 2·25 million more of the low paid into the tax net. The top rate of tax went up to 83 per cent. The effective top marginal rate of tax on unearned income rose to 98 per cent.

The Labour party is again mouthing the promises of the 1960s and 1970s, using similar wording. Such suggestions repeated in the early 1990s will not fool the British people. Indeed, I am amazed that the Labour party should even consider making the sort of promises that were outlined in the speech of the Leader of the Opposition.

At the last general election, the Leader of the Opposition said that he would increase spending on the national health service by 3 per cent. above the rate of inflation. That was considered to be a remarkable statistic. Over the past four years, the Government have increased it by no less than 3·35 per cent. We have achieved far more than the Labour party promised at the last election.

I do not believe that the fraud that the Labour party is seeking to perpetrate on the British people will be successful. The public will not fall for it. I hope that, before the House adjourns, we shall find time for a full-scale debate on the Labour party's economic promises—especially those made by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech last week—so that the public will be more enlightened about their effects.

4.36 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I can inform the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) that, in my constituency in 1979, we had an unemployment rate of 3·7 per cent. among an electorate of 84,000. After 12 years of Tory government, with an electorate of 54,000 as a result of parliamentary boundary changes, we have an unemployment rate of 9·7 per cent. I could go on at length about the facilities and amenities of which my constituents have been deprived over those 12 years.

We shall be adjourning for 10 days. An early-day motion, signed by 125 of my hon. Friends, asks the Leader of the House to make time available for us to discuss the financial and administrative decisions of the mid-Glamorgan training and enterprise councils. I have attended the House on numerous Thursday afternoons and have asked the Leader of the House whether he is prepared to make time available for that to be discussed. On each occasion, he has said that Parliament is too busy, that the Government's programme is too full for him to make time for debates on early-day motions.

Some people suggest that early-day motions are not worth the paper they are written on. There used to be an agreement that, if an early-day motion had more than 100 signatures, the matter could and should be considered. It would be a good idea if we shortened the spring Adjournment, or if, between now and 23 May, the Leader of the House found time for a debate on this issue. I do not believe that the Government should have time off for good behaviour or good attendance. They could not even field 100 Members to ensure that the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill —which they supported—was passed. The would not qualify for 10 days off for hard work. Only Opposition Members would qualify for that.

The only major legislation between now and when the Government are prepared to stick out their necks and call an election is the Finance Bill. Why can they not find time to debate some of the issues that I have raised? Opposition Members have raised other issues and will probably raise them again in the debate. I am sure that we would all like a full debate on some of the statements by Cabinet Ministers in Monmouth and elsewhere. For example, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) who is the chairman of the Tory party, claims, as did the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), that Mr. and Mrs. Britain and their two children are better fed and far better off than they were 12 years ago. The right hon. Gentleman claimed that taxes were down, that the national health service was vastly improved, that education was much better and that family incomes were up by a third.

I visited St. Paul's cathedral the other day and saw an inscription about its architect Christopher Wren which reads, "If you seek his memorial, look around you." That is good advice. We should look around us to see whether education and health provision are better, whether taxes are down and whether family incomes are up by a third.

In debates such as this, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) usually speaks about unemployment. Unemployment is escalating in Ogmore, as it is throughout the country, but we do not seem to have time to debate it. When the Secretary of State for Employment or the Secretary of State for Wales give the statistics about unemployment, how many of us recall visits by the unemployed to our surgeries and think about the desperate situation of people who become redundant? More often than not, both husband and wife become redundant. They have mortgages and hire purchase commitments which were taken on because of the Government's repeated belief that there is either no recession or that, if there is, it is bottoming out and that everything in the garden will look lovely. In Wales, unemployment has never looked lovely, and it has got appreciably worse in the last 12 years. The Government seem content to let it escalate further.

The week before last, Rolls-Royce announced that 5,000 people were to be laid off. It appears that there will soon be redundancies at the Ford engine works in Bridgend in my constituency. Last week in Ogmore, a major factory attached to the Crystal Tyler group announced more than 1,000 redundancies.

Our schools have crumbling walls and outside toilets and pupils are begging and borrowing books, or at least begging their parents to pay for them. Roofs leak and ceilings are falling down. School meals are deplorable compared to what they were 12 years ago, and teachers who have spent most of their lives in the profession are deciding to leave it. Some pupils are not being taught at all. What sort of future will there be for the nation if we allow that to continue?

At one time, homeless people were found only in London or in the major cities such as Manchester and Liverpool. Now they are to be found in places such as Bridgend. Some Tory Members smile at my mention of the homeless. They should join me at midnight for a visit to cardboard city under the bridge at Victoria. Such conditions are becoming commonplace throughout the country. Tory Members could ask the people in cardboard city whether they could get a mortgage or a loan to enable them to be housed.

Then we could look at roads and traffic jams and at the thousands of car owners who pay licences to have decent roads but are now travelling by rail and tube, not only from parts of Wales but from the east coast. We recently travelled by train to Eastbourne for a by-election and noted the danger, dirt and unreliability of the system.

Over the past few weeks, I have asked taxi drivers about the current state of business. They told me that there are no tourists in London even though it is the spring season. The major hotels are empty. American and other tourists are not coming, not only because of the cost of hotels but because of rubbish in the streets, parks and playing fields. Street lamps are rarely lit, police are not always available and crime is escalating. Such a city will not attract tourists from America or any other country.

Twelve years ago, the cost of water was included in the rates, and few people realised that they were paying for water or sewerage facilities. Now they understand the meaning of the privatisation of water, because most of them are struggling to pay rising bills. Private organisations and plcs have been established to provide gas and electricity, solely to ensure profit for Tory Members and their friends. We could also look at the profits made by those who invest in the City and at the lot of people who have been evicted from bed-and-breakfast hostels.

Look at the queues for national health service treatment. Perhaps some of us should feel the pain of those waiting for operations, sometimes for years. If one has the cash and can pay £7,500, one can save the life of one's child if it needs a heart operation, provided one goes to an opt-out hospital.

That is what has happened in the past 12 years. Conservative Members talk about what has happened in their constituencies, but they should visit some parts of Wales that have always suffered a depression since the 1920s and the days of the national strike.

I say to the House and the country that we cannot afford to allow the health service to collapse. It was created to ensure that people received medical attention when they needed it. We did not agree to establish a medical service from which people would gain financially.

I am sure that the Government will call an election after Thursday, when I am confident that a Labour candidate will be elected at Monmouth. He will come to the House to prove to the Government that it is time for them to go. It is time for them to call an election, and I hope that it will be sooner rather than later, so that all the issues that I have raised can be put to the electorate.

At that election, 12 years of Tory misrule will be given the heave-ho by the electorate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will be in No. 10 and we shall have a Labour Government who will share with and care for the community.

4.51 pm

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I hope that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) will forgive me if I find it a little difficult to endorse his final remarks. However, I am sure that he will welcome the fact that I intend to follow him and his hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) by referring to unemployment.

I hope that my tone will prove to be a little less hectoring than that of the hon. Member for Bolsover. The focus of my speech will be more specific than that of either Opposition Member, as I wish to discuss white collar unemployment. That phenomenon, if that is the correct word, has emerged during the current recession to a far greater extent than it did during the previous economic downturn of the 1980s.

I make no apology for raising this subject. My constituency is situated about 25 miles from the City of London and we have virtually no industry. However, the administrative and clerical headquarters of the Ford motor company is situated in my constituency. Unfortunately, it recently announced that many hundreds of jobs are likely to go in the next few years as a result of computerisation.

About 70 per cent. of my working constituents commute every morning to the City of London. They are predominantly employed in the service industries. In the 1980s the service sector over-expanded, but there can be no doubt that it is now facing an economic downturn.

The 1980s were characterised as the decade of the yuppie, excess and the unacceptable face of the City. However that may be, and apart from the opportunities that were available to the yuppies in the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of my constituents were then able to obtain employment in the City in a variety of menial jobs. Those opportunities have now been replaced by difficulties, especially for those leaving school, who look to the City of London, as my constituents have done for many years, for employment.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his characteristic courtesy in giving way. Presumably when his commuting constituents are made unemployed they register at the local unemployment offices. How great has been the increase in unemployment in his constituency? In my constituency, unemployment is now approaching 13 per cent., which is dismally high.

Sir Robert McCrindle: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that it is not has high as that, not least because

[Sir Robert McCrindle]

one of the effects of the downturn in the City of London —largely brought about by increasing costs in the City —has been a certain decentralisation.

On a net basis, my young constituents are not presented with as many employment opportunities in the service industries as in the past, but some such opportunities are being recreated in my constituency. It is important to draw attention to the net effect of the economic downturn in the City, but I suspect that it is not as extreme as that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). I suspect that most of that unemployment stems from industry rather than commerce.

About 40 per cent. of the current increase in unemployment has occurred in the service sector-dominated south-east. In 1990 about half of company liquidations also occurred in that region. It is important to stress, however, that many of those liquidations and a good deal of the unemployment stem from industry, including, for example, manufacturing and construction. However, whereas the number of service-sector company liquidations during the 1980s recession was small, the same cannot be said now.

The service sector has been hit harder than the manufacturing sector and hit twice. It has been hit by the general economic downturn, a fact which we must now concede, and by a deep structural downturn. As a result of the big bang on the stock exchange a few years ago, we are arguably a good deal more efficient, but it is easy to overlook the fact that machines have tended to replace people. I appreciate that that has been happening in industry and commerce for a long time, but the impact of the downturn in employment in the City has been considerable.

It is also important to take into account the emerging challenge from Europe. I suspect that most hon. Members welcome that challenge, but, whereas the City was once pre-eminent in banking, insurance and investment services, it is now facing great competition from the European centres of Paris, Milan and Frankfurt. The natural economic downturn resulting from the recession has combined with a structural downturn. It is difficult to know how to address that problem.

I believe that the overall demand for some services will decline in the next few years. There is no doubt that that decline has already occurred in house building. I accept that that, in itself, is not a service industry, but such construction is reflected in the demand for mortgages. Many of my constituents are employed in banks and building societies. We all hope that, as a result of the Government's present economic policies, the demand for housing will grow in the near future to relieve the problems now experienced.

There has also been a substantial downturn in recent months in the tourist industry. Once again, it is to be hoped that, as the standard of living of the British people returns and as the international recession begins to fade, people will again begin to enjoy tourism, with more of them coming from abroad to enjoy tourism in this country. There is one way in which the Government could be of considerable assistance to the service industries. Recently they have advanced, through the Secretary of State for Employment, a relatively small sum of money to encourage the tourist industry.

I am most grateful for what they have done, but I believe that there should be a major marketing campaign to try to revive the tourist industry, which is so important to this country in terms of invisible exports and the balance of payments. I hope that a far more substantial sum of money will be made available, provided—this will, I think, be echoed by my right hon. Friend—that the tourist industries are prepared to match, I hope pound for pound, all the money that the Government make available.

Britain's recession and our entry into the exchange rate mechanism have led to a sustained period of high interest rates to control inflation. That must be right. I have no quarrel with the policy that the Government have followed. In turn, that has led to a prolonged squeeze on domestic demand and that, in turn, has affected a number of service industries. When the general standard of living is not rising, as it has throughout most of the period during which the Government have been in office, people tend to put off the purchase of insurance and other forms of investment. Once again, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Government's succeeding in beating back inflation and restoring a rising standard of living—the single most important contribution that the Government can make to the restoration of the prosperity of the service industries.

The hon. Members for Bolsover and for Ogmore concentrated, understandably, on the manufacturing industries, but growth in the manufacturing industries will overtake that of the service industries towards the end of this year. Some people say that it will stay that way until at least the mid-1990s. That is welcome news for the manufacturing industries, but I have always felt that a balance between manufacturing industries and service industries is the way for a truly effective economy to proceed. Therefore, I hope that I may be permitted to say that it would be unfortunate if we did not manage to sustain the rate of growth that we achieved during the 1980s in the service industries.

I accept that, if service sector companies are to survive, they will have to adjust. The pattern of tourism is changing. The demands in terms of investment, banking, savings and insurance are changing. I do not wish to give the impression that there is a magical way in which the Government can assist, but my reason for raising this important subject is that it has been all too easy to overlook the fact that there is white collar unemployment in this country. That is because it is a relatively new phenomenon. It is very easy, therefore, for the Government's efforts to be directed towards improving the position of manufacturing industries and for them to overlook the fact that they also need to turn their attention to the service industries.

There is concern about takeovers and mergers. I concede straight away that some people in the City benefit greatly if they are employed by a European company that wishes to make a particular takeover, but there is considerable concern among others who are employed in companies that are likely to be the subject of takeovers. That trend is likely to increase rather than decrease in the services sector as we approach 1992. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be well advised, therefore, to look again at the policy on mergers, monopolies, takeover bids and the like.

I am not alone in believing that in present circumstances it seems to be extremely easy for a German, French or Italian company to make a successful takeover bid for a British company, whereas it remains extremely difficult for a British company to do the same in reverse. If that is even remotely so, we are a long way from the level playing field that I have always felt is the sine qua non of a successful 1992.

I have deliberately chosen to address the House on one subject that is of considerable concern to me and to the 70,000 people whom I represent. I note with approval the Government's current advertising campaign relating to unemployment. I have no quarrel with that campaign, but, try as I may, I can find little in their advertising approach that is of great interest to those of my constituents who, in the past, would have had no difficulty in finding clerical or administrative employment in the City of London.

The Government's advertising campaign seems to me to be focused substantially on unemployed people who are seeking employment in manufacturing industries. I do not wish to suggest that that should not be so, but it is symptomatic of the fact that, because we are unaccustomed to white collar unemployment, we tend to overlook the problem in the service industries.

I use this opportunity, therefore, to draw to the attention of the Treasury Bench the very real need to take account of the growing problems in the service industries. White collar unemployment, I repeat—I think for the third time—is a relatively new phenomenon in this country. It affects, in particular, my constituency and a good many other constituencies around London and large provincial cities.

There is not one simple policy change that would make the problem disappear, but I respectfully suggest to the House, and in particular to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, that by recognising that the problem exists and taking account of it in the policies that we evolve, particularly the advertising campaigns that we are directing towards assisting the unemployed, we shall make the country, and my constituents in particular, feel that their needs, as unemployed people, are just as important as those of people who are seeking re-employment in the manufacturing industries.

5.7 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I wish to follow up one point to which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) drew our attention—the huge increase in white collar unemployment. Before I do so, however, I should point out that, before the House goes into recess, there should be a ministerial statement on what was said by Mr. Bernard Ingham over the leaking of the Solicitor-General's letter. Some may say that that happened five years ago and that it is irrelevant and a matter of no great concern. I do not accept that; nor do my right hon. and hon. Friends. What happened was totally unjustified. The House will remember that the Attorney-General was absent and that the Solicitor-General was in charge. He wrote a confidential letter—certainly confidential, to say the least, within the machinery of Government. That letter was leaked to the Press Association. I cannot possibly accept, therefore, that it is of no consequence at all and can be dismissed.

Last night, Mr. Bernard Ingham denied that No. 10 was in any way involved. Responsibility was clearly laid on the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Mr. Ingham did not say so, but that was his clear implication —that the person who did the leaking was Sir Leon Brittan. If only to clear up the honour and integrity of Sir Leon Brittan, the Government have a responsibility to make a statement, and to do so before we go into recess. What came out last night was official confirmation—if one likes, for the first time—of the rather murky way in which so much was undertaken during those years when Bernard Ingham was the chief press officer at No. 10 Downing street.

Although the Leader of the House was not apparently a victim, it might be of interest to him to learn that Bernard Ingham confirmed the rubbishing of Ministers. One of the prominent casualties of that rubbishing was the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), who initiated this debate. It could be said that another right hon. Gentleman who was rubbished and humiliated in a manner that no one in Government should find acceptable certainly had his revenge. He is not present in the Chamber now, but we know what happened as a result of his revenge.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Did my hon. Friend notice that Bernard Ingham also said:

"I told Bowe that I had to keep the Prime Minister above that sort of thing"?

Does that not show that he was quite aware, as a senior civil servant, of crooked misbehaviour?

Mr. Winnick: I tend to agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that he would agree that any attempt to blame another civil servant—Colette Bowe—would be totally unacceptable. I hope that that is clearly understood.

I draw attention however to the continuing job losses in the west midlands. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar was right to refer to the increase in white collar unemployment. I have been involved for many years with a union that organises white collar employees. White collar unemployment is not necessarily a new phenomenon. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar that the escalation in the number of white collar unemployed is new. White collar workers in the south-east used to think that they would have reasonable prospects of obtaining other jobs if they were made redundant, but that is no longer the case. Getting another job is now far from easy and no doubt the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar understands what has happened to so many of his constituents.

Between August and October last year, there were notified redundancies at 27 establishments in the west midlands. Between last November and April this year there were notified redundancies at 80 establishments. I have referred to "notified" redundancies, but the figure is likely to be higher. Between November and April, there were nearly 10,000 redundancies in the metropolitan part of the west midlands.

The number of redundancies is bad enough, but in many cases plants have been closed as well. I have a list of the redundancies that have occurred over the period to which I referred and that list includes the names of firms that have decided to close down. The majority of the job losses in the west midlands were in engineering and the causes in most cases were falling orders and a drop in demand. No one can claim that the latest recession has not bitten deeply in the west midlands.

[Mr. Winnick]

What worries many of us who have the honour to represent west midlands constituencies is that we are approaching almost the sort of situation that existed 10 years ago. As the House is aware, there were large-scale redundancies and many factories were closed, never to re-open. Far too many people lost their jobs and were unable to find other jobs for a considerable period. The Government said at the time that those circumstances were necessary. They said that it was a one-off and that it had to happen to shake out manufacturing industry and over-manning.

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) gave a much publicised interview last week in which she referred to the difficulties of adjusting to losing her job as Prime Minister. I can understand that an ex-Prime Minister might find it difficult to adjust, particularly given the circumstances in which the right hon. Lady—most likely to her surprise—found herself out of No. 10 Downing street. However, what about people who have been made redundant recently, or indeed those who were made redundant 10 years ago, who are left with no job at all? I in no way underestimate the difficulties of young people, but 40-year-olds and 50-year-olds who are made redundant may also be discriminated against because of their age and may never be able to work again. That is certainly tragic.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Over the past few months, the Conservative party has painted itself as the caring party, and Conservatives have said that they are interested in elderly people and in the community. Given their track record and the way in which they treated their former heroine and dumped her so cynically, what credibility do they have when they say that they care?

Mr. Winnick: Perhaps I am being unfair to Conservative Members, but they seem first and foremost to care about themselves. Perhaps I am being unduly cynical, but Conservative Members will know whether I am right or wrong.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar may be aware that I tried to introduce a Bill that would have made unlawful advertisements for jobs in which there was a reference to age. However, the Government decided not to support it. The Government do not appear to be too concerned with the difficulties facing the people to whom the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar and I have referred, whether they be manual or non-manual employees. People who are made redundant and have tremendous difficulty finding other jobs live on a pittance and when they retire, their occupational pensions are reduced as a result of their redundancy. We should not underestimate that factor.

We need a strong manufacturing base now as much as we needed one in earlier years. Manufacturing investment has fallen below the level that existed when the Conservative Government took office in 1979. Investment overall—not just in manufacturing—is forecast to fall by 10 per cent. during this year. That is hardly good preparation for 1992 and the single market.

I know someone in the House—not a Member—with a rather clever contraption comprising a watch with a calculator attached to it. As I come from the west midlands, one would expect me to ask him whether it was made in the United Kingdom. He said, "You must be joking." We have reached a sad state when so much new technology is manufactured abroad and imported into this country. Some no longer believe that we can produce such goods, but of course we can. We still have the talent. We were the first country to industrialise with all those skills in the west midlands. Unfortunately, so much has gone by the way and our forecast in 1979 that the Government were out to undermine manufacturing industry has unfortunately proved all too true.

The Government have failed manufacturing industry, and they have failed the west midlands. No doubt the Prime Minister will take into account the local election results and what happens in Monmouth later this week before he decides the date of the next general election. However, when it comes, it will be the duty and responsibility of Labour Members and candidates to explain to the country what has happened and describe the failure of British industry and manufacturing industry in the west midlands and throughout the country in the 12 years of this Tory Government.

5.18 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I speak in this debate as a Scot by birth and upbringing and as a Welshman by political adoption. There are not nearly enough Celts on the Conservative Benches, as I am sure my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House would agree—even if he cannot agree with anything else that I am about to say. Indeed, there are not many representatives of Scottish or Welsh constituencies on the Conservative Benches. They number a mere 16 out of a total parliamentary party of 369. Disraeli's oft-quoted remark comes to mind:

"The Tory Party, unless it be a national party, is nothing."

Although we obviously have the numerical authority to govern, it is increasingly questioned whether we have the moral authority to do so. That will cease to be questioned only when we have a much broader geographical spread on this side of the House and reasonable parliamentary representation in Scotland and Wales. Too often, the Conservative party in both countries is seen—justifiably seen—as no more than the branch of a predominantly English party without its own distinctive identity, even though, in Scotland, the Conservative party has its own separate organisation.

It has been my belief, and one that I have consistently held for over 20 years, that we as a party should pursue and implement a policy of parliamentary devolution. When I first contested a Scottish parliamentary constituency 17 years ago, that policy was supported by my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Scotland and by his predecessor, although of course both have done a volte face since.

Whether they like it or not, devolution is now back on the political agenda. Indeed, the word is occasionally now uttered from the Treasury Bench, which, a few months ago under the previous Prime Minister, would have been a capital offence. Yes, devolution is back on the agenda, and it is back because the Government have put it there.

Even the most ardent devolutionists had to accept that, as long as we had so many tiers of local and national Government—town and community councils, district councils, county councils, the Westminster Parliament and the European Assembly—it was difficult to argue for yet

another tier. The local government review—the near-certainty of single-tier authorities within the foreseeable future—changes everything.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will know from recent opinion polls in Scotland, the vast majority of Scottish people—83 per cent. in the most recent—want an Assembly or even more than an Assembly. I am sure that even he will agree that that is well without the margin of polling error. There is also a considerable majority for devolution in Wales. As a party we must respond to the aspirations and needs of the Scots and the Welsh. I am not alone in saying so. Mr. Michael Hirst, the former hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden and president of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association, said last week:

"It is essential that we have the widest ranging debate possible on this issue."

Mr. John Mackay, the former hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, former Scottish Office Minister, former chief executive of the Conservative party organisation in Scotland and now ennobled in the recent list of working peers—all Conservative Members will welcome his return to Parliament—said:

"Public opinion in favour of devolution cannot be ignored. We cannot ignore the debate that is taking place in Scotland and we have got to take part in it."

Mr. Struan Stevenson, one of our liveliest parliamentary candidates north of the border and prospective candidate and next Member for Edinburgh, South—*[Laughter.]* Opposion Members may laugh, but they will be laughing on the other sides of their faces when they hear that result in the next election. What I am saying is borne out, as they know, by the local election results just a week ago. Mr. Stevenson said:

"We must admit that we have been wrong to shut our ears to the demands from Scotland for more self-government."

As Conservatives, we believe in one nation, in a united kingdom, but we must recognise that the major strength of the United Kingdom is the variety of the different parts that constitute it. Each must be allowed to make its own distinctive contribution that will strengthen, not weaken, the whole. That will strengthen, not weaken, the union. The identities of Scotland and Wales, as all hon. Members know—I am glad to see so many Scottish Members opposite listening closely to my remarks—are rooted in different cultures, geography and history, quite separate from those of England.

Scotland has its own judiciary and legal system, its own Church and educational system. Wales has its own language and highly distinctive culture. There is something inconsistent and illogical in the present British Government's concern about the possible loss of sovereignty, in European monetary and political union, while ignoring the demand for greater sovereignty from countries that actually constitute the United Kingdom.

The English may see Europe as a threat to their national sovereignty. The Scots and the Welsh see Europe as an opportunity to give new hope and fresh life to their own national identities, to bring about not a dilution, but a strengthening, of their sovereignty.

The extent of constitutional change already brought about by developments within the European Community is hardly appreciated in this House, let alone in the country. That process is bound to be accelerated by the treaties that will follow the two intergovernmental conferences that are currently taking place. We in this House, in our parliamentary institutions and governmental system, must adapt to that.

There is nothing heretical or anti-Conservative about devolution. Historically, this party played a principal role in the establishment of the Scottish Office and in the creation of the post of Secretary of State for Scotland.

Decentralisation, diffusion and the dispersal of power and control are central to Tory philosophy. We have only to look at current policies to see that philosophy at work. In education, the local management of schools is devolving, from the local education authorities to the schools themselves, to the headmaster, to the teachers, to the governing bodies, the actual running and financial management of schools. In the health service, with self-governing hospitals, there is devolved, from health authorities to doctors and to nurses in the front line, the actual management and running of hospitals. If we can have devolution in education and in health, I do not see why we cannot have it also in government and in our parliamentary institutions.

If we also believe that education and health require such radical reform less than 50 years after the last major education reform, and less than 50 years after the NHS was set up, surely the institutions of government and of parliament itself might merit similar treatment. We have clung to the Victorian vision of the unitary state and its institutions, which are no longer capable of delivering efficient government or the effective scrutiny of Government. We cannot cling to institutions that have hardly changed since that time and leave them fossilised as they are. Our constitution surely should not be frozen in one moment of time but must be allowed to evolve. It is capable of improvement. We should look to the experience of many of our European allies and learn from their constitutions what might serve us well here.

Devolution would increase democratic control and the accountability of Ministers and civil servants. If we can agree on nothing else—I think we agree on quite a lot—Scottish Members on the Opposition side of the House will share the frustration we experience in Wales in monitoring and scrutinising not only legislation but also the decisions of Ministers. They have no Scottish Select Committee. We, fortunately, have a Welsh Select Committee, but even Select Committees and Grand Committees are not sufficient for the purpose of checking the Executive. We need far more time to debate Scottish and Welsh issues on the Floor of the House, but we never get it.

Westminster hardly faces a light load of work. Year in and year out, we are faced with heavy legislative programmes that are barely digestible and are spewed out at each Session's end, after insufficient debate and scrutiny. There is never sufficient time for the debate of European directives and issues on the Floor of the House. We are now dealing with the complex, highly technical legislation of the 1990s with a parliamentary machinery that has barely changed since the 1890s.

During this Parliament, the Government have made radical proposals for the reform of education, requiring much higher standards of teachers. We have made radical proposals for the reform of the health service, requiring greater efficiency and better value for money from doctors and nurses. We have carried through a major reform of the legal system to bring the legal profession up to date. As a Government, we are ready to tell everybody else how they can and should do their job better. Yet our system of

[Mr. Keith Raffan]

government, of parliamentary democracy, more inefficient, more ineffective and more desperately in need of reform than all those professions put together, remains untouched.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland said last week that devolution would undermine the stability of the United Kingdom. It would not. What would undermine the stability of the United Kingdom is if we did not listen and respond to the legitimate desires and demands of the vast majority of the Scottish and Welsh people.

5.29 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): We are debating a motion that we should adjourn for a week for half-term. Some of us wish that we were adjourning for a general election, although that wish might not be universal. The reason why I wish that we were about to have a general election is that, in the past 11 years, we have never had a Government who had the majority support of the British people. Until we force a constitutional change, we shall not have a Government who have the majority support of the British people. As long as we continue to have minority Governments, we shall continue to have elected dictatorships who tyrannise the country and act against the popular view. I hope that, whenever it comes, the election will enable that change to take place and that the movement towards fair votes and electoral reform will at last force this place to be a democratic assembly.

In the meantime, there are certain matters of which it would be useful for the public to be aware before Parliament rises towards the end of next week. Some of the issues have been alluded to. They are the subjects of the most current topical debate. They are how well the economy is doing, what the Government are doing about the education service, what they are doing about the health service and the facts and figures about the economy, our education and our health. I shall comment on these matters at the local and the national levels.

I wish to start at the local level. The other day, I attended, in my capacity as president, the annual general meeting of the Southwark chamber of commerce. I have never before heard an outgoing chairman make such political comments—political with a small "p". In his address, he said:

"The way the government and the banks have handled things is like throwing a drowning man a lead lifebelt."

That was a man who had worked in a local firm for many years. It was an engineering firm which had been in Southwark for almost a century. His firm went into liquidation only a few weeks ago.

Fewer than five people at that meeting believed that the recession was bottoming out or that we were coming out of it. The rest of the Southwark business community represented at the chamber of commerce meeting believed the opposite. That is not surprising, because, although it is true that unemployment was falling until a year ago, since then it has increased considerably in inner London. I listened to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) speaking on behalf of Essex commuter employees. Unemployment has increased by nearly 25 per cent. in the last year in constituencies such as mine. The position is no different in other inner-London and dockland constituencies either.

There is no doubt that the economy is not in good shape. Neither is there any doubt that at local level the education service is not in good shape. Many of our schools are in great need of capital spending for repairs. Many of our schools face great difficulty in recruiting, and even more difficulty in retaining, teachers. We still have no guarantee that the service can meet anything like the needs that exist. Swimming pools are being closed. Swimming lessons are being prevented. The youth service is being decimated. Youth club provision, which is part of the non-statutory education service, is being reduced wholesale in many parts of inner London. The budgets for our youth services have been reduced enormously.

Our state and county education systems, now administered in inner London by the borough councils, are in a desperate state. At the same time, favoured islands of opportunity receive huge sums of government money. In one corner of my constituency a city technology college receives about £10 million of government money. That is about 10 times the capital which all the other schools in the London borough of Southwark put together receive. That £10 million is for fewer than 1,000 pupils out of a total youth population in a borough of 225,000. That is a gross imbalance.

To cap it all, only two weeks ago, with timing that could only be described as inept, the Lewisham and Guy's hospital trust announced cuts. One of the ironies about the announcement made in the second part of April was that the *Guy's and Lewisham Trust News* was edited and produced by a company called Healthy Relations Ltd. If it is healthy relations or healthy public relations to announce in such an inept way cuts of £6·8 million and a further saving of £6 million and cause a political earthquake such as that which followed, "healthy relations" has a new meaning.

When the health authority handed over responsibility to the trust on 1 April, it did so without being certain that there would not be further cuts. I and other local Members of Parliament from both sides of the House met the health authority last Friday. It told us that it did not know that the budgetary cuts that had since been announced would be the total and final result. Furthermore, it had not subsequently met as a health authority to say that it was satisfied that it would be possible to provide the same level of health care as had been promised before the cuts.

Much of the local community, if not all of it, does not believe that it is possible to cut £6·8 million and take a further £6 million out of a budget of £128 million—that is 10 per cent.—with a potential loss of 600 jobs, to be announced later this month, without affecting the service. We believe it even less when, on asking how the authority will judge how effective the service is, we are told that it will be judged by the throughput of the patients. We all know that it is possible to kick patients out of beds sooner but that the patients do not necessarily have better care. That is against a background of bed cuts.

The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and I and others also attended another meeting at which it was confirmed to us that in the South-East Thames region the inner London health authorities have suddenly been told that the indices of deprivation by which we have traditionally had our funding adjusted to take account of the unarguable extra difficulties of inner urban areas have been removed and replaced by criteria that do not allow for any such compensation for the difficulties experienced in our part of the world.

I do not find it surprising that I have received only a holding answer to a parliamentary question that I asked on 2 May when I requested figures on the number of beds available to NHS and private patients in Guy's, King's College and St. Thomas's hospitals and in each of the three relevant health authorities. I asked for the number of beds to be listed for each financial year since 1979. I wonder whether the Government will ever find a time when they will find it possible to print the answer without being gravely embarrassed.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): To be fair to the regional health authority, we were told that there was some good news. It was that, with mortality rates rising, we might receive more money.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right. He and I remember that, on other occasions when we have raised anxieties about the Government's underfunding of the health service in inner London—it was not a single party issue—the most famous reply that we have been given is that we might have cause for complaint, but the chairman of the local authority was bullish about the prospects. Someone lying in a corridor for three days in King's College hospital might feel somewhat less bullish about the prospects of the health service being safe in the Government's hands.

To compound the announcement of cuts, we now know that a massive amount is being spent on new management jobs in the health service. The *BMA News Review* of March 1991—I had better be careful with the quotation and make sure that there is no uncertainty about the source—contained an article bearing the headline:

"£80 million management explosion"

It said:

"The amount the NHS spends on administrators' salaries seems likely to go up by at least £80 million this year as a direct result of the government's reforms . . . during the six months from May to October last year, health authorities advertised for almost 1,800 new staff to fill administrative posts."

That is only administrative posts. The article went on:

"This is almost six times the £14 million which the Government promised in December to cut juniors' hours and twice the £35 million which the Health Secretary put towards cutting waiting lists in January."

In South-East Thames region alone, 140 new administrative posts were advertised between May and October. Clearly, the economy, education and health are unsafe in the Government's hands.

At a national level, the current row about public spending commitments which features daily on our television and radio programmes, must leave the public bewildered. The Government are defending an education service, a public transport service and a health service which everyone, from professional to lay person, knows is underfunded. The Government expenditure programme in this year's Red Book makes it clear that although, suddenly, in the run-up to the general election, they are investing more money in the health service, in the years after 1991-92 the increase will drop substantially.

The Labour party, in the same breath as attacking the Government's record—I join it in that—rules out tax increases and makes spending commitments about which even it does not sound convinced. The Labour party says that it will spend extra money that will exist only if the Conservatives reduce taxation to 20p in the pound. We now also learn that that is less than the Government themselves budget to spend. The Labour party says that it is worried that the Government will fund that extra spending from increased value added tax.

If Labour Members are so worried about that, why did they not vote with us against the last VAT increase? In reply to the Government, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) says that his party would not be willing to provide more funds for the health service unless there is economic growth. That will not reassure people in hospitals, such as Guy's and Lewisham or anywhere else.

Before the House rises next week, the public would benefit from knowing the policies of all three parties and how they propose to fund those policies. We say unequivocally that we need to spend more on public services and we are sufficiently realistic to say also that, if necessary, we shall raise taxation to pay for that. We are in no doubt about that. A penny on the pound would go to education. That will release extra resources for the health service. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Yes, an increase in taxation from 25p to 26p in the pound would provide extra money which would be devoted entirely to education and training. Therefore, it will not be necessary to redirect existing money to education because extra education spending would be funded from new income. *[Interruption.]* The Government have stated clearly that they will not ask people to pay more. Indeed, they still have a policy of reducing taxation to 20p in the pound.

It is clear that Tory Members are worried about that. I have been to Monmouth, as I know some Tory Members have, and certainly the electors there are worried about it. They are looking to the three parties for answers to the questions: are the parties willing to spend more and to ask people to pay more? If the public get that information from the three parties before we adjourn, the position will be clearer. Certainly, the public would be clear that only one party says that it will spend more and is willing to ask people to pay more as well.

5.43 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): During my speech, I shall make some comments which may seem unkind about the Labour party's taxation policy, but, having heard the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) expound what may be called the Paul Daniels approach to taxation——

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Paul Daniels is much better.

Mr. Hughes: My right hon. Friend says that Paul Daniels is much better. All I ask is that anybody who considers the taxation policies of the different parties, particularly the electors in Monmouth, should study the hon. Gentleman's words. What a lot of nonsense and double accounting. His party must come up with something more substantial than that to convince anyone of its policies.

I have been impressed by hon. Members on both sides talking about their worthy projects for the recess, should we agree to this motion. They have told the House what they will do in their constituencies and what they will find out about. I intend to reintroduce myself to my daughters and to remind my family who I am.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Why should they suffer?

Mr. Hughes: My daughters are young ladies of eminent good taste and seem to enjoy my company. They just cannot remember when they last had it.

The first of two matters which I wish to raise in this debate is serious and affects constituents of Members on both sides of the House. Racial attacks are not new. Part of the problem is that they do not affect many people, yet those who are affected are affected severely. The problem is brought to mind particularly because of reports of racial attacks in the Thamesmead area and the death of an Asian over the weekend.

I am talking not about the odd attack here and there, but about systematic attacks on Asian and coloured people by a small number of white people. The Asian community fear that, if they talk too much about the attacks, they will be thought to be whingeing and not wholly wedded to life in this country, and that that will somehow instigate further attacks. There is some justification for all those feelings, but there is no justification either for the way in which many people have ignored racial attacks or for believing that this is not a major problem for many Asian and black people.

Before the recess, we should debate an idea which was proposed some 11 or 12 years ago by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, but which has never been adopted. It is simple, but it has merit. The suggestion is that a racial attacks squad should be set up in Scotland Yard. After all, we have a serious crimes squad, a serious fraud squad, a drugs squad, a pornography squad, a murder squad and doubtless several others. Why should we not also have a racial attacks squad?

We have those centres of expertise in Scotland Yard because a local police unit, comprising a chief superintendent running police officers, cannot be reasonably expected either properly to investigate repeated racial attacks or to deal with the problems of the families who are subject to such attacks, without recourse to a centralised unit which has knowledge of and can co-ordinate what has been happening, and the necessary expertise. The matter should come before the House because it is of enormous concern to many of my constituents and to many constituents of other hon. Members in their daily lives. We should be failing in our duty if we did not point out to the police and the Home Office that more can be done and that we expect more of them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) said that the Labour party's economics were those of Arthur Daley, and that analogy stands up. However, it is well known in the Labour party but less well known in the Conservative party that they are not the economics of Arthur Daley but rather those of "Only Fools and Horses" —*[Interruption.]* Labour Members should be patient. They reveal that they know what I am going to say, and it is rather embarrassing for them. Members of the Labour party and the national executive committee have nicknamed the leader of the Labour party "Rodney" and the shadow Chancellor "Del Boy", because of the nickname that Del Boy has for Rodney, and that is how they are known in the House. Anyone who has ever watched the television programme will know that it is not a flattering nickname. The wry smiles on the faces of Opposition Members show that they, too, have heard that and are rather embarrassed.

We must examine not what the Labour party says but what it writes. It recently produced a document entitled "Opportunity Britain", which the House should debate because it contains over 100 spending proposals. They are not all bad—many are desirable—but we do not know what they will cost. One has only to listen to Labour Members in the Chamber or speaking on amendments in Standing Committees, or to share a platform with a Labour Member, to see that every problem is met with a promise of new money. To an extent, everyone knows that the promise is unsustainable.

There has been much talk about unemployment, and the problem is taken seriously on both sides of the House. However, we did not hear much from the Labour party when unemployment fell for 40 consecutive months. The Labour party seemed to forget about it then; it seems to be a problem only when unemployment rises. The Opposition know that their proposal for a minimum wage would add dramatically to the unemployment level. They will set it at 50 per cent. of average male earnings, on a rising scale. Do they accept that that would add 750,000 to the number of unemployed, or do they have another figure? If so, where does it come from, and what is their estimate of the unemployment effects of their minimum wage proposals?

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) spoke about the privatisation of the water industry, but he forgot to remind the House that it has led to the biggest ever investment programme in the water industry. This year, private industry has invested £28 billion in the water industry. What scale of investment does the Labour party believe is necessary? Clearly, the hon. Member for Ogmore thinks that there has been too much investment, because he said that the bills were too high. If the investment is not paid for by consumers and the borrowings of private limited companies, where would the money come from? Where would the Labour party find the money to invest in the water industry?

What would be the standard rate of income tax under a Labour Government? The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) promises that 14 out of 15 basic rate taxpayers would not be worse off. How can the Labour party know that, when it has not announced its plans? If it has made plans, it should tell the House.

The Labour party does not understand that lower income tax stimulates economic growth. It is called supply side economics and it has worked here, in the United States and even in many European countries run by socialist Governments. The proof is contained in the figures for the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers, who now pay substantially larger proportions of tax than they did under the previous Labour Government.

When one considers the Labour party's spending and taxation proposals, it is not a question of reading their lips but of reading about the expensive promises contained in their policy documents.

5.55 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I shall not try to reply in detail to all the points raised—as usual, a wide range of subjects have been raised—but shall concentrate on one or two important issues that are currently the subject of debate outside the Chamber.

Several hon. Members, including a number of my hon. Friends, concentrated on the key issue of unemployment. The subject was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and

my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). Interestingly, it was also raised by a couple of hon. Members of other parties. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) specified white collar unemployment, and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) stressed the dangers of unemployment in his constituency. It would be remiss of me not to associate only myself and the Labour party with the deep concern about unemployment in all sectors of the economy and in all parts of the country.

One of the consequences of high unemployment has emerged in today's reports of what is happening at Rolls-Royce. Over the weekend, 34,000 Rolls Royce employees were given notice and were guaranteed reinstatement only if they accepted substantially worse conditions of employment. That is a classic symptom of high unemployment. Employers have the whip hand and can impose conditions that would be unacceptable in normal circumstances. It is dreadful that such an employer-dominated diktat can be imposed and it is yet further evidence of the way in which normal traditions of collective bargaining and national and company agreements, which have served us well over the years, have been eroded by the Government's legislation and high unemployment policies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North pointed out the irony that much of the problem arose under the leadership of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who seems incapable of coping herself with the consequences of unemployment. Her unemployment is pretty cushioned, as she still has a job that is deeply envied by many people —she is a Member of Parliament. However, she seems to be temperamentally incapable of accepting that she is on the scrap heap, having been personally responsible for putting so many of her fellow citizens on it. Nothing could better summarise the distorted values of the former Prime Minister than her unforgettable quote last week,

"Home is where you come to when you have nothing better to do."

That was said by the former leader of what press releases tell us is the party of the family. Nothing could demonstrate more unequivocally how totally out of touch this Administration have been during the past 12 years. For so much of that time, it was led by someone who places a value on the home that would be unrecognisable by the vast majority of my constituents and by people throughout the country. I do not wish to minimise the critical importance to people of work, not only for their standard of living but for their self-esteem and sense of worth. That importance has been dreadfully eroded by the Government, and it is essential that we have a debate on unemployment before the House rises.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Behind the scenes, the Government are dramatically cutting back expenditure on those with disabilities and special educational needs up and down the country, including my constituency. My local training and enterprise council is about to announce the almost complete withdrawal of access by the disabled to training programmes that help them to maintain employment and give them job opportunities. That information brings the Government into great disrepute. They are not only attacking able-bodied people but are cynically withdrawing financial resources to maintain in employment those with serious disabilities.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point, and the issue of the general underfunding of TECs was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore. It is further evidence that the Government, whatever their rhetoric and press releases say, have a fundamental lack of concern for the issues of most importance to our constituents.

Another issue that was touched on during the debate and which is central to political debate outside the House, is the announcement of the date of the next general election. It is not that I do not like doing this job, but I fervently hope that this is the last time that I have to participate in a recess Adjournment debate. It is not that such debates are unattractive, but it is clear that this Parliament and Government have run out of steam and it is time that the matter was settled in a general election.

Several Conservative Members have made a number of assertions about what the country wants. There is only one way to settle that issue—in the form of a vote. Early-day motion 819, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) sums up the matter. It states:

"That this House expresses its concern at the terminal decline of the present Parliament, elected in 1987; and seeks to encourage the Prime Minister to take the necessary action to end the painful suffering of an administration, which has come to the end of its time".

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey thinks, as we do, that it is time for a general election. However, I cannot agree with him that the right way to settle the matter would be a system of voting that would ensure permanent control by minority parties in the centre. That does not strike me as a fair way of determining general elections.

Mr. Ray Powell: My hon. Friend is talking about the general election. It was predicted in the press that, if the Government lost the Monmouth by-election, we would have to wait through a hot, steamy summer, until October or November. The opinion poll just announced by HTV gives 41 per cent. to Labour, 33 per cent. to the Government and 21 per cent. to the Liberals. Does my hon. Friend think that, in the light of that, we shall have to have another such Adjournment debate before the summer recess?

Mr. Skinner: There is another poll relating to Monmouth, which asks how people would vote if it looked as though the Labour party was likely to win. The result of that poll is even better—51 per cent. voted for Labour, 35 per cent. for the Tories and 13 per cent. for the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friends are joyous bearers of good news. I have been unable to see the news bulletins tonight.

The downside is that we all know that the Prime Minister, in his agony of indecision, and having failed to get any clear message from the computers that he set to work on the local election results, is anxiously awaiting the outcome of the Monmouth by-election before he can make up his mind. I doubt whether he will be able to do so then.

The Leader of the House, and certainly the Government, owe it to us to make a decision. It is high

[Mr. Grocott]

time that the indecision about the election date was sorted out. If the Prime Minister is not going to have an election in June, it is up to him to make it plain to the country that he will not have one until later in the year. There is a clear precedent for that. The last Prime Minister who became Prime Minister by accident, and to his and everyone else's surprise, was Sir Alec Douglas-Home. After playing around with the election date for a while, he had the sense to make it clear that he would not have an election until late in 1964. This Prime Minister should do the same. Whatever the Leader of the House feels about the election date, he must agree that constant uncertainty cannot possibly be to the benefit of the country.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: No, I will not give way.

It is essential that, by this time next week, when the Prime Minister has been able to assess the result of the Monmouth by-election, he should at least announce whether there is to be a general election in June.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: No: if I give way, it will eat into the time of the Leader of the House, for which he would not be grateful.

I have a fairly clear idea why the Prime Minister is not keen to call a general election quickly—he does not want to go down in history as the shortest-serving Prime Minister this century. A little bit of statistical analysis that I have been able to carry out as I while away the time shows that the shortest-serving Prime Minister this century was Bonar Law, who served for 209 days. The current Prime Minister has had 167 days and, according to my calculation, he will have to keep going until at least 25 June to avoid earning the title. If he wants to beat Sir Alec, he will have to keep going for a year, and he will just about beat Sir Anthony Eden if he goes on until February 1992.

Sooner or later, we shall all know what the Prime Minister has decided. It is crystal clear—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members were angry when I started my speech, and, having heard the results of the opinion polls, they are even more wound up. I can understand that. The prospect of unemployment is deeply distressing for Conservative Members.

Another reason why we need absolute clarification on the election date—the Leader of the House is in a better position to acknowledge this than anyone else—is that the House is running out of things to do.

Mr. MacGregor: Rubbish.

Mr. Grocott: The Leader of the House says, "Rubbish," but on three occasions last week the House rose by 9 pm. I shall inform the House for the record, because it is worth checking the statistics, that the House has not risen before 9 pm twice in a week at any time in the past 13 years. Last week, it happened three times because the Government are running out of things to do—

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: I shall not give way. Conservative Members are getting very excited. Like them, I wish that we could resolve this in a normal manner. I hope that they will impress upon the Prime Minister the absolute urgency of calling a general election, so that we do not have rows across the Chamber, but the voters can sort out the matter in the polling booths. Although Conservative Members do not like to hear it, it is extremely rare for the business of the House to fold up as early as it did three times last week.

I shall certainly give way if Conservative Members wish to challenge me on the following point. There are three crucial debates taking place in the House this week—I hope that hon. Members who have spoken in this debate will forgive me if I do not include this one. Those three crucial debates are, first, the one on the health service and opting-out hospitals tomorrow, which was called by the Opposition and is to be held in precious Opposition time. The second one is on famine in Africa and on the effects of famine and related matters in Bangladesh, as well as matters affecting the Kurds. That debate will be initiated by us and will take place in our precious parliamentary time.

The other crucial debate—it is indeed crucial; hon. Members get very excited and jump up and down when the subject is discussed—is on public expenditure. On Wednesday, we shall debate the Government's public expenditure plans. Opposition Members have requested this debate week after week after week, but the Leader of the House has repeatedly refused it. I know that the Government find this information uncomfortable. The Leader of the House has only to check *Hansard* to see repeated confirmation of what I am saying.

Sir Robert McCrindle *rose*——

Mr. Grocott: If the hon. Gentleman wants to comment on the specific points to which I have been referring, I shall gladly give way.

Sir Robert McCrindle: I am glad that I have finally managed to persuade the hon. Gentleman to give way.

In pinpointing the admittedly very important subjects that the House, on the Opposition's initiative, is to debate tomorrow, the hon. Gentleman seems to have overlooked entirely an extremely important debate that is to take place on Thursday. On that day, we shall debate the question of planning—a matter of enormous importance to a great many of our fellow citizens. Perhaps the reason for the hon. Gentleman's lack of interest in that debate is that he will not be here on Thursday. Like many of his hon. Friends, he will be at the Monmouth by-election. The reason for the early rising of the House on three occasions last week was that there were no Members on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Grocott: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to accompany me to any pub of his choosing in Britain. I will give him £1 every time planning is mentioned if he will give me £1 every time unemployment or the health service is mentioned as a key subject facing the nation.

The Leader of the House should be defending the interests of hon. Members. He should ensure that, before the House rises for the Whitsun recess, we are given an opportunity to debate the declining standards of ministerial accountability. That matter should concern the right hon. Gentleman. It certainly concerns my hon. Friends and myself that Ministers are not answering

questions properly. The Government's tactic has been to use agencies to move Ministers one step away from responsibility for the running of their Departments. That is a well-established practice. Why does a question to a Minister get a far less effective response than did the very same question two years ago?

Let me give a specific example involving a matter that is important to me and which I understood at one time was important to Conservative Members. I refer to the cost of running quangos. One of the Government's many broken promises is that it would reduce the running costs of these bodies. This is a specific and serious matter. Two years ago, I asked the Civil Service Minister to state the total cost of running quangos in each of the previous 10 years. I received a detailed answer, for which I was grateful.

Last month, I tabled a similar question, and, in reply, was told to look up the figures in the Library. If that is to be the Government's practice, we might as well simply have a ministerial stamp for every question. Any figure can be provided by the excellent research staff of the House of Commons Library. It is outrageous that the Government are ever more frequently using such a device as a means of avoiding answering specific questions. One might imagine that the Government could at least get their own act together.

Many Opposition Members, in their attempts to obtain information, have to put identical questions to all members of the Cabinet. Very recently, I tabled a very simple question to a number of Ministers. I asked each of them to list the Government appointments for which he or she—in the case of the present Cabinet, it is always he—would be responsible in the next 12 months and in the 12 months after that. Those appointments will, of course, become the responsibility of the incoming Labour Government. Whatever Conservative Members may think, that is a totally legitimate parliamentary question. It is entirely right that we should want to know about these appointments, about length of service and about the salaries. Repeatedly I received the standard reply:

"Information about the number and levels of remuneration of people appointed to public bodies by my Department is given in 'Public Bodies 1990', copies of which are available in the Library."

There were a couple of honourable exceptions. The Secretary of State for Education and Science gave a detailed and valid reply, and the Secretary of State for Defence at least provided page references to enable me to find the answers in various Government documents.

The response of the great majority of Ministers is another illustration of the way in which the Government treat hon. Members with contempt. It is high time the Leader of the House discharged his role and put these matters to rights. In fact, what we want is a rapid end to this tawdry Government. They have gone on for far too long. The endless election debate cannot be allowed to continue. Matters should be put to the people in a general election as soon as possible.

6.15 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I shall follow the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) in one thing—and in one thing only, as I have rather less time than he occupied. I should like to answer all the questions that have been put to me, but, because of the shortage of time, I shall not be able to do so.

I shall begin by dealing with the matter which has been at the heart of much of this debate. It was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and, by implication, by every other Opposition Member. We have always known that the Labour party is weak on economic policy and on spending. In the general election in 1987 it proved just that, and was crucified as a result. Opposition Members are getting into the same shambles today. Indeed, on the question of spending and tax, they are getting more rattled, muddled and shrill.

Let me direct the attention of Opposition Members to two things that have happened today—on the "Today" programme this morning, and in this debate. On the "Today" programme, John Humphrys said to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith):

"Let's be clear that that is what your are saying: 'Twenty billion pounds on top of the £40 billion—that's the extra that we're spending in the coming three years.'"

In fact, the figure is £38 billion, but John Humphrys rounded it up.

"Is that what it's about, John Smith?"

The right hon. and learned Gentleman replied:

"What Neil Kinnock did was to use as an example the fact that if you get 2·5 per cent., which is about the trend rate of growth of the British economy, that's what you get in extra public expenditure. That was a perfectly simple and perfectly clear example"—

[Interruption.] I am quoting exactly what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, and it is not at all surprising that Opposition Members do not like to be pressed on the point. It is crucial, and, if necessary, I shall devote my entire speech to it.

In reply to John Humphrys, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"We do not add that on top of all the public expenditure forward programmes that have already been announced. We do not accept that's a reasonable way of doing it because it's to add on top, and we never said that, and it's a total misinterpretation to do that."

I have never heard such a meaningless piece of a sentence. The reason for it is that, on this point, the Labour party is absolutely on a hook.

Mr. Ray Powell: What is the relevance of this?

Mr. MacGregor: I will come to its relevance in a moment.

The Labour party is on a hook. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman meant that £20 billion was not being added—if he accepted the figure of £38 billion as the increase in public expenditure, to which he would not add anything—what is all this about? It is that the Labour party will not spend anything more. That is the answer to practically every speech made in this debate.

If, on the other hand, the hon. Gentleman did not mean that, and he really meant another £20 billion on top of the £38 billion already announced, that presupposes——

Mr. Grocott: No one believes this.

Mr. MacGregor: But it is crystal clear. If the hon. Gentleman does not think it a fair point, he knows nothing about economics, taxation or spending. If the money does not come from growth or from the £38 billion, where will it come from? It will come from extra taxation——

Mr. Skinner *rose*—

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I will finish my point first. The money will come from extra taxation, not from increased growth, because that is already provided for. Will the money come from more taxation? I give way to the hon. Member for The Wrekin, who can tell us the answer.

Mr. Grocott: We will not take any lectures on economic management from a Government who, in 12 years, have managed to achieve record interest rates, record mortgage rates, record balance of payments deficits, reduced industrial production and investment and a shambles of the economy. We will take lectures on many things, but not on economic management. This country has been run by Arthur Daley for the past 12 years.

Mr. MacGregor: The House will have noted that there was no answer to the question; the Labour party does not want to answer it, because it does not want even to hint that it will increase taxation. The Opposition want to imply that they will increase spending on all sorts of things and then try to get out of the difficulty by spurious reference to economic growth. The fact is that that is impossible in the next three years because the spending plans already provide for that growth. So the money must come from increased taxes. The electorate will take note of that. The Prime Minister was right to say in Perth the other day that Labour's plans would mean another 2p in the pound on income tax each year.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West pointed out, the Opposition are always asking for more spending across the board. Their Treasury spokesman has told us that there will be increased spending only on child benefit and pensions, but the rest of the Opposition call for increased spending all the time on whatever happens to interest them. They were at it again today. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) wanted more money for charities. The hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) wanted it for unemployment—as did the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)——

Mr. Alfred Morris: Answer my questions.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall come to them if I am allowed time.

The hon. Member for Ogmore wanted spending on training and enterprise councils, and the hon. Member for The Wrekin had his agenda. We have and constant calls for more public spending. That is at the heart of the argument, and I am right to concentrate on it, because it is what Opposition Members have spent all their time doing.

Opposition Members cannot add up the figures. The hon. Member for The Wrekin did not answer the point that I put to him. The Liberal Democrats are just as bad. I found what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said extraordinary. He may not have meant it, but he said that the Liberal Democrats would raise an extra £2 billion from another 1p on income tax. At least his party is fair in saying where the money will come from. But the hon. Gentleman said that the Liberal Democrats would spend it on education, which would enable them to spend less on the national health service. I do not understand that, given that the rest of his speech was about spending more on the national health service. Perhaps he only meant spending more on Guy's hospital—it happens to be in his constituency—and letting the rest go.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I did not say that we would spend less on the national health service. I said that we would not have to raise the money that the health service needs from additional taxation, because that money would go to education. The health service would be funded by us to the tune of an extra 2 per cent. every year over a five-year Parliament.

Mr. MacGregor: Given that we have already agreed that there are already spending plans to use the economic growth, presumably the money will not come from that. So if the Liberal Democrats are going to spend more on the national health service, presumably they will have to raise income tax by more than 1p in the pound.

There is a more serious point for the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey talked of raising £2 billion from income tax to increase spending on education. His party voted against the proposal in the Budget to increase VAT from 15 to 17·5 per cent., thereby losing £3·9 billion in revenue. Those figures do not add up, either.

The clear message from this debate is that the Opposition want to spend more across the board. They have got themselves in a muddle on tax and spending plans and they cannot get out of it now.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) discussed whether we were rising for a week to go on holiday. I am sure that we are all going to do all sorts of other duties—but I shall leave that matter aside, in view of the time. He also mentioned the health service in Shropshire but did not ask me to answer his specific points, which I shall forward to the Secretary of State for Health; but he made a general point about the ownership of cottage hospitals. As he will know—I have to put this in a very condensed form—under the National Health Service Act 1977, health authorities can take into account resources that come from property and any money arising from its sale, which must be used within the national health service to provide better care for patients. My right hon. Friend will know that that is what we have done; the sale of assets can be and is directly devoted to the service and to patient care.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe raised a number of points, three of which I will pick up quickly. He mentioned VAT on charities. As he will know, the Government have done a great deal to increase the resources that go into charities, not only by more than doubling in real terms the grants to charities but by a wide variety of tax relief measures which encourage more voluntary giving to charities. I could go through the figures, but they are very large.

The value of all tax reliefs on charitable giving to charities is about £800 million a year. The hon. Gentleman's point about the health service—I am not talking here about the Paterson institute—was answered by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury on 28 March:

> "I have agreed that in the special case of the health programmes, the additional costs to health authorities should be added to existing provision as a claim against the reserve. This will also apply to comparable expenditure in Scotland and Wales. The increased provision will be granted to the

national health service in supplementary estimates for 1991-92, to be presented in due course later in the year."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. *519*.]

The right hon. Gentleman will also know that the rights of the child convention was signed by the United Kingdom on 19 April 1990, and it will be ratified as soon as possible. I am sorry that I do not have time to go into his point about AIDS.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling discussed the case of a constituent. As he recognises, it is fundamentally a matter for the county council, but he raised several important points and it would be quite proper for him to consider raising the matter on the Adjournment if he were not satisfied in due course.

My hon. Friend also discussed the local government Audit Commission, of which I have always been a strong supporter. It is admirably led and it has produced a number of excellent reports which, if followed through, would achieve greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency and much better value for money. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment undertook in an Adjournment debate to consider a number of my hon. Friend's points, and that he is doing.

As a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and bearing in mind my time at the Department of Education and Science and what the commission said then, I endorse what my hon. Friend the member for Gedling said about its importance, and I shall certainly bear in mind the possibility of a debate. As in so many other areas, the commission's activities show that the effectiveness of provision of services stems not just from the amount of money spent but from how it is spent. So I am happy to go along with what my hon. Friend said about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) raised a number of points about unemployment in the white collar industries. I noted that he said that he had no quarrel with the polices to get inflation down, and, as he will agree, they are crucial to long-term employment. He also mentioned tourism. I remind him that, in 1990-91, the Government are spending about £533 million on tourism.

I should very much like to debate Scottish devolution with my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan)——

Mr. Raffan: And a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. MacGregor: Indeed. I spent a great deal of time when in Perth last week discussing that, but time will prevent me from doing so today, because I want to finish on two important issues raised by the hon. Member for The Wrekin.

First, the hon. Gentleman said that the House was running out of business. That is simply not true. About 25 Bills are still to be completed in the next few months—a big programme. The reason why the House rose early last week, which I am sure was welcomed by those hon. Members who complain that the House rises too late, was that there were no members of the Opposition to scrutinise the Finance Bill and other Bills. I gave the normal amount of time to discuss the Finance Bill, and usually the House takes it all.

We have had many debates on economic issues and on unemployment, and I welcome them. The Opposition outlined a policy of implementing a social charter and strengthening it immediately, of imposing a training levy of 0·5 per cent. and then, as I think they said, increasing it pretty quickly, and of imposing a national minimum wage. I can think of no package of measures designed to lose more jobs than the combination of those three ideas.

We welcome the opportunity to continue to debate the alternative approaches to employment. I am happy to have that opportunity, and there will be many such occasions in the near future but, above all, the debate shows that the Labour party is the party of high spenders. It has proved that time and time again, but it does not want the electorate to know about tax concessions.

6.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As there are three minutes to go, may I ask the Leader of the House, first, what will he do about rate capping in Lothian? Secondly, what will he do about Heveningham hall, which is near his constituency? In the early 1970s, the Secretary of State for the Environment offered to buy it from the Government, but he was told by the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that no Minister in his Government would buy a house like that. Since then, it has been shrouded in mystery.

May I ask a direct question: are Ministers sure that the Swiss bearer bond holders are not operating for the Government of Iraq and have never done so? Was the hall at any time the property of Saddam Hussein, because many people in Suffolk believe that it was? An inquiry should be set up under the likes of Lord Charteris, with whom I have been in contact to establish the clarity of the future of Heveningham hall.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) mentioned Mr. Ingham. A statement should be made, because we should know what is the position of John Mark. By implication, his private secretary has been adversely affected in the press by Mr. Ingham's memoirs. What is the position of Colette Bowe and that of Leon Brittan——

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 22 (Periodic adjournments).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 23rd May, do adjourn until Monday 3rd June.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Only you can deal with this issue, perhaps through Mr. Speaker.

Today, I tabled a question to the Minister for the Arts, and it was referred to the Welsh Office. I have now received a reply from the Welsh Office to say that the Welsh Arts Council, which was the subject of the question, is not responsible for museums in Wales. My question was about the funding of museums:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether he has met the Chair of the Welsh Arts Council to discuss funding for museums in Wales."

The Ministry referred my question to the Welsh Office, and the Minister there in turn replied:

"The Welsh Arts Council has no responsibility for museums in Wales."

With your knowledge of the House, of Committees and of everything else, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you tell me where I should submit my question—to Mr. Speaker, the Chairman of Ways and Means or someone else?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I confess that I do not know the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. I can say only that I have no responsibility for determining who shall be responsible for answering specific questions. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will leave it with us and that the hon. Member for Lewisham, East, (Mr. Moynihan), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, has taken note and will get a response for the hon. Gentleman. I have no responsibility in such matters.

Mr. Powell: I am grateful for your reply, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I raised the issue because it is important for those of us on the Back Benches to receive answers to our questions. We do not want Ministers to transfer our questions hither and thither and then find that we do not receive a reply from any Department.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is fair to complain. What the hon. Gentleman says should be noted to ensure that he gets a fair response.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend refers to a point of order for Mr. Speaker or, indeed, for the Procedure Committee. It will be within your recollection that the late John Silkin, passionately against the advice of some of us, agreed to limit the summer and other recess Adjournment debates to three hours. This was sacred private Members' time, yet once more it was being eroded. This afternoon, we have seen the Front Bench—and I must say, that it was both Front Benches—use the occasion for the usual exchange of party politics. The summer Adjournment is an opportunity for Front-Bench Members to raise matters, however controversial.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Back-Bench Members.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) raised the specific issue of unemployment. This is the occasion to raise matters relating to our constituencies, not for the normal party yah-boo. We can raise not only matters relating to our constituencies but urgent matters such as that raised by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) about the Government's reaction—or otherwise—to the behaviour of Mr. Ingham. This is the only opportunity that we shall have to do so, and it is essential to establish what Mr. Ingham and Sir Leon Brittan are doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is skilful, but I suspect that he is now trying to raise the issues that he might have raised had he had the opportunity to participate in the Adjournment debate. As to the content and way in which the debate is conducted, the yah-boo political arguments came from all sides of the House.

The extent to which the debate is in order is a matter for the judgment of the Chair. Although much caused me concern, nothing this afternoon caused me to rule a speaker out of order. The duration of the debate is more properly a matter for the Procedure Committee, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will want to make representations to that Committee. Now, perhaps we might move on.

Coal Industry (Restructuring)

6.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I beg to move,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

The order, which was laid before the House on 15 April, is the fifth annual order under section 3 of the Coal Industry Act 1987. The House may recall that section 3 was amended last year by section 2 of the Coal Industry Act 1990 which extended by one year up to March 1993 the period over which the Government may pay restructuring grant and increased the total limit on grant from £750 million to £1,250 million. The ceiling is further increasable by order up to £1,500 million.

The order has three main purposes.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I am sorry to interrupt so early in the Minister's speech. I have a copy of the schedule; can the Minister explain why heads 3 and 4 have been left out?

Mr. Moynihan: I shall attempt to explain. Head 4 was excluded last year. The House may recall that the Coal Industry Act 1990 provided for the corporation's accumulated group deficit at the end of March 1990 to be covered by a deficiency grant, if my memory serves me correctly. That included an exceptional provision for about £1,500 million for concessionary fuel supplies. That deficiency grant provision extinguished the need for the Government to pay restructuring grant for concessionary fuel liabilities. My hon. Friend also raises the question of the social welfare activities heading in the schedule. British Coal has never claimed under that heading.

The order specifies the restructuring expenditure for which grant may be paid in respect of costs incurred in the present financial year 1991-92. After the explanation that I have just given about the types of expenditure set out in the schedule, I must point out that they are the same as those of last year.

The order establishes the proportion of this year's restructuring costs which will be met by grant. The corporation's financial results are sensitive to the rate of grant contribution towards restructuring costs. Although it remains our policy to transfer the costs of restructuring to the corporation at a rate that reflects its ability to bear them, the market conditions faced by British Coal continue to be difficult and to affect the rate at which the corporation can move towards full commercial viability.

I trust that hon. Members will agree that it is desirable for the corporation to be able to continue its policy of carrying out the necessary restructuring of the industry through a process of voluntary redundancy. That is possible only by offering generous redundancy terms. To safeguard the industry's longer-term financial prospects and not to jeopardise the financial position in the short term, we propose to continue the rate of restructuring grant of 90 per cent., which applied in 1990-91, for the current financial year.

The third main provision, which I touched on earlier, is that paragraph 6 seeks to increase the limit on the aggregate amount of grant that may be paid from £1,250 million to £1·5 billion, as empowered by the 1990 Act. The total restructuring grant payments made by the

Government between April 1987 and March 1991 have been £1,045 million. The Department's estimated provision for 1991-92 is £300 million. If the full provision is drawn down this year, the total payments will be over £1·3 billion and the ceiling needs to be raised to allow payments above £1,250 million to take place.

6.41 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I welcome the opportunity to raise a number of issues of great importance to the British coal industry and its communities. The Minister made claims about the difficult market that British Coal now faces. In our debate last July on the 1990 restructuring grants order, I expressed our concern at the lack of progress on the start of negotiations between the generators and British Coal on the post-1993 contract. I said that the negotiations were vital for planning the future of the coal and electricity industries, and for boosting the morale of everyone in the coal industry.

We are still waiting for progress to be made. In March this year, the new chairman of British Coal said:

"Everybody is aware that the power contracts—their length, tonnage and price involved—are the key to the future of British Coal. Indeed, they will determine whether there is to be a future for coalmining in Britain at all."

Once again this weekend, we have seen negotiation by press release. The *Financial Times* says that PowerGen will cut its order from British Coal by half to between 10 million tonnes and 15 million tonnes, and that National Power will follow suit.

Real negotiations, not informal talks or threatening rumbles through the media, must begin now. If they do not, we shall have not only a coal industry unprepared for the demands that it will face, but an electricity industry that will rush to fuel its power stations with no thought for the long-term needs of its customers or the nation. In such circumstances, the Government cannot continue to stand aside and allow the continued contraction of the industry, the loss of national resources and the effects of increasing coal imports on our balance of payments. The Government would be better off spending their time bringing about negotiations rather than holding competitions to appoint a financial adviser on the privatisation on the coal industry.

As in previous years, the order contains an element for expected redundancies in the industry this year. Over recent years, the industry has had to react to the shock waves of threatened and real pit closures and job losses. Every miner who picks up his newspapers to read headlines such as "British Coal strategy—a further 16,000 jobs at risk" must wonder how long his job will last. The industry has recently forecast that another 5,600 jobs will be lost in the coming year with the closure of another seven collieries.

Those are not ideal circumstances for urging British miners, as the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy did last week, to increase productivity, which he acknowledged to have increased already by more than 90 per cent. over the past six years. It is vital for miners and their families and for the country that a new era of stability should be heralded in the industry as soon as possible.

The order also makes provision for the money for British Coal Enterprise Ltd., for opportunities for retraining and resettlement and for attracting a diversity of industries and employment chances. Those are of major importance to the coalfield areas. We have registered our concern——

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): The hon. Gentleman referred to the work of British Coal Enterprise Ltd., in helping to retrain people and to mitigate the consequences of the closure of collieries. In the past, the Opposition have been less than complimentary about the work of British Coal Enterprise. Will the hon. Gentleman now take the opportunity to confirm his and his party's full support for its work?

Mr. Barron: If the hon. Gentleman will contain his excitement a little longer, he will find out what I have to say about British Coal Enterprise.

We have in these debates in the past registered our concern that the opportunities offered by BCE are inadequate to meet the needs of the areas in which it operates. The shortcomings of BCE's job and career change scheme, or JACCS, are of particular concern. The main shortcomings are that the training period that can be funded is often insufficient to enable people to get recognised industrial qualifications, that before training is made available they have to show that there is a job to go to at the end of the training period and that the time limit within which funding must be secured is only six months from the date of accepting redundancy. Anyone who has studied long-term unemployment in the coal mining industry before the scale of redundancies of the past five years will know why the JACCS scheme is not meeting the needs in mining areas.

Other problems are the slow and cumbersome process of determining applications, and the fact that anyone who takes short-term work soon after the closure of a colliery can easily find himself ineligible for assistance. The JACCS scheme is out of step with most other organisations in training and economic development which emphasise the enhancement of the individual's skills irrespective of the immediate availability of appropriate employment.

BCE's operations, despite the shortcomings, have been allocated approximately £5 million and British Coal itself another £1 million or so from the European Coal and Steel Community funding under RECHAR. All the evidence points to the funds being used to replace British Government funds instead of supplementing them.

About £3 million is earmarked for JACCS. To demonstrate additionality—a word that crops up regularly when discussing European Community money for mining areas—some or all of the training places funded, the length of training and the unit costs of training should be increased. BCE has yet to explain how it intends to use the new RECHAR money.

Nearly £1 million is allocated to BCE's job shops—the advice centres set up at pits that are closing to counsel redundant mineworkers about job vacancies in their area. Once again, BCE has not been able to show any increase in the scale of job shop services. Is this another case of non-additionality for the Government?

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman referred to the RECHAR programme. He will be aware of my concern last year, when the map for it was being determined by Commissioner Bruce Millan of the European Community. Parts of my constituency that were facing pit closures were not included in the map. I understand that the Coalfield Communities Campaign and the Labour party have made

[Mr. Batiste]

representations to Commissioner Millan. Will the hon. Gentleman support representations made by the Government to include my constituency in the RECHAR map?

Mr. Barron: I shall obviously do that. I shall deal with recent developments relating to the RECHAR programme and say what we expect of the Government. At this stage, I am more concerned about the money that comes through the RECHAR programme directly to the Department of Energy, and about what the Department does with it. Notwithstanding the money that I have just mentioned, nearly £1 million is allocated for subsidising BCE's operating losses.

The subsidy is to be calculated in proportion to the ratio of former mineworkers to all jobs in BCE-supported businesses and managed workshops. As BCE is supporting these jobs anyway, it is hard to see that the subsidy is anything other than a straight substitution of EC funds for United Kingdom Government funds.

British Coal is destined to receive some RECHAR funds, partly for its early retirement scheme for non-industrial employees and partly for its skill scope scheme, which gives employees an opportunity to take up specific training packages to enhance their skills. Unless British Coal can demonstrate that the £300,000 that it is to receive from RECHAR will represent additional training for its employees, we can only assume that it is another example of the substitution of the source of the funds.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My latest information on RECHAR is that Commissioner Millan will not let the money come into this country unless the Government give assurances that it will be additional money and will not go into the Treasury by the back door.

Mr. Barron: That is right. Bruce Millan knows exactly what has been going on for a long time regarding European Commission grants for coal-mining areas. On this occasion, he will not let the Treasury get away with it. He has my full support on that, and the support of the Coalfield Communities Campaign and many local authorities.

We need to ensure that assistance is getting to the places where it is most needed, and questions need to be answered. The Government have totally mismanaged the RECHAR programme. First, they have refused to pass on in full the EC aid to coalfield local authorities in Britain —over £100 million. I agree with the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) that any areas in his constituency that are losing coal-mining jobs should be covered by the RECHAR programme. We should ensure that the Treasury does not hold that money once it has been allotted.

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman's comment does not sit well with the comment that he made a few moments ago. He has said that he fully supports Commissioner Millan's decision to withhold money from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Barron: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to represent the mineworkers in his constituency—as does my friend Colin Burgon, whose name the hon. Gentleman has heard before—he should not be a stooge for the Treasury, which has withheld £100 million from coal-mining areas. Labour Members will not do that, and the hon. Gentleman should think again.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) challenged my hon. Friend, who responded properly. My agent, Mr. Richard Russell, has been assisted by British Coal Enterprise Ltd. Some of us appreciate the work done on the ground, but do not necessarily relate that to the sort of people with whom the hon. Gentleman associates.

We responded to the hon. Gentleman's challenge; now would he care to respond to that offered by my hon. Friend? Will he join us, and make it clear to the Government that people in ex-coalmining areas bitterly resent attempts by the Treasury, and other Departments, to stop Brussels sending money to help us—or to allow any money sent to us to assist the Treasury to extricate itself from the mess that it has got into?

Mr. Barron: Yes, that is what we should ensure. The Treasury's intention to sink the money into its coffers has forced the European Community to withhold the cash, delaying or stifling completely the grants and cheap loans that would be of such benefit to mining areas.

It now appears that the money designated to help redundant mineworkers acquire new skills, and consequently new employment prospects, is not going to British Coal and British Coal Enterprise as additional funds, as was intended by the Commission, but is being substituted for British Government funding. Can the Minister demonstrate the additional character of the funding provided to British Coal and British Coal Enterprise Ltd. under the RECHAR programme? If not, only one conclusion can be drawn; not content with trying to get their hands on the money that should be going to coalfield local authorities, the Government are ripping off redundant mineworkers.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): My hon. Friend makes a significant point about the Treasury creaming off money from the EC. I understand that, if a local authority receives this money, it will be taken into account when the Government decide whether the authority should be poll tax-capped. It is a double indemnity against the Government's putting money into mining communities.

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If the Government do not change their attitude, the money will not come into the country to go into the Treasury's coffers. I support the Commission's stand on that. Conservative Members who say that they represent coal-mining areas should have the courage to tell Treasury Ministers that it is wrong to withhold help to coal-mining areas that have suffered job losses in the past five years under the Tory Government.

Mr. Andy Stewart: The Treasury and the Department of the Environment calculate the additionality money on the same basis as other European countries. The local authority grants have been top-sliced by an additionality of £46 million. A large slice of that will come to my constituency through my local authority, yet Opposition Members would deny my constituents some of that £46 million.

Mr. Barron: The only people who are denying the hon. Member's constituents such help are the Government he

supports. A few months ago, I went with representatives of my local authority to the Department of the Environment to discuss funding from the European Commission and additionality. The Minister said that he fully supported our view that money should not be withheld by central Government; that money should be provided in addition to the moneys paid from the Exchequer. The only people who will not change their minds are those at the nasty Treasury.

The hon. Members for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) and for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) may have to face the consequences of the Government's actions in the next few weeks or months. They now want to move the responsibility from the Treasury to Brussels.

Mr. Batiste *rose*——

Mr. Andy Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Barron: I shall not give way again.

The debate gives us an opportunity to refer to some crucial and important matters concerning the coal industry. Restructuring grants have been the order of the day since 1987—£1,500 million for restructuring the coal industry. Nothing has been said about the long-term consequences for the industry and the country.

During Question Time today, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) asked the Minister about a ballot within the industry on its future. The Minister said that we would have such a ballot shortly: the next general election. That may solve many of these problems. We cannot wait for that ballot to take place.

6.58 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): The order shows yet again our Government's continuing support for the coal industry. Since 1975 almost £7 billion of new investment has been committed. The significance of that——

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by direction of the CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS *under Standing Order No. 16 (Time for taking private business), further proceeding stood postponed.*

East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Standing Order No. 27(1)(a) in the Standing Orders dealing with private business lists the criteria for the depositing of maps and plans for works to be carried out under a private Bill. The Bill before us does not list any works to be carried out, but a series of works is implicit in it. Ten level crossings are all authorised by previous Acts, and Standing Order No. 27 requires plans to be submitted where works to be carried out have been so authorised.

The promoters' statement makes it clear that the board intends to carry out works. For a start, to close up a foot crossing requires some alteration to the authority given by previous Acts for public access. Even a fence or the securing of a gate constitutes a work. More than that, paragraph 5 of the promoters' statement makes it clear that the board is discussing or endeavouring to discuss with the highway authority for each crossing—and 10 are listed—the possibility of diversionary or alternative routes for the ways in question. That could mean the building of a bridge which would involve considerable works; some of them would be on land owned by the board.

It seems that the Bill does not conform with Standing Order No. 27, because, although the Bill does not specifically list the works, the fact that it lists crossings that are proposed to be stopped up implies the carrying out of works, and therefore some plans and maps should have been deposited. I am sorry to say that no such plans or maps have been deposited, because British Rail has chosen to take a narrow view of a diversion which implies the carrying out in some places of extensive works.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I have instigated inquiries into the matter, and I am assured that the examiner of petitions has examined the Bill and reported that Standing Orders have been complied with.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House will recall that, some time ago, a Bill that had gone through all its stages here went to the other place, where it was found to be defective and amended. The Clerks are excellent, but they are human and sometimes make errors of judgment, as they erred in a technical part of that Bill. Will you consider a short adjournment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to enable you and your officers to examine the matter in depth to make sure that no error of judgment has been made in the Private Bill Office?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have told my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that the examiners looked at the point that he raised. Will you confirm that they did examine that point, rather than simply satisfying themselves that, in their view, the procedures were being carried out? My hon. Friend made an extremely valid point. Did the examiners determine whether plans and maps should have been submitted with the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House will have noticed that, during the points of order, I have been seeking advice. I should be unwise if I did not fully accept, and show full

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

confidence in those who have assured me, that there is nothing in the Bill that does not comply with the requirements of the Standing Orders.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am bothered by the fact that the short title of the Bill refers to the stopping up of certain level crossings on the east coast mainline railway and contains no general additional item about related matters or other purposes. Part II of the schedule refers to the stopping up of a level crossing

"whereby the same footpath is crossed by the Leamside Branch railway."

How can that be proper when the Bill's title refers specifically and exclusively to the east coast main line railway?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The technical point on which the hon. Gentleman seeks assistance is probably a matter for the debate. I assure him and the House that the examiners have been through the Bill and are satisfied that it complies with the requirements of Standing Orders.

7.6 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The tragic accidents in recent years at Clapham, Purley and Lockington have helped to heighten public interest in and the critical importance of rail safety. Our railways are extremely safe and have a good record. The challenge to British Rail and to other rail operators is to continue to build on that hitherto excellent safety record and to meet the new challenges presented by a 21st-century rail system. High-speed lines on which trains will travel at up to 125 mph with projected speeds of 140 mph are one such challenge.

British Rail is certainly not resting on its laurels, and positive action is being taken to promote safety. For example, new signalling systems and automatic train protection are two innovations being developed by British Rail in tandem with its new high-speed route proposals to help build a better, safer railway.

The tragic accident at Carr lane, Doncaster, which I do not think is in your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in which a young woman and two children of four and seven were killed on a crossing which is also a footpath and a bridleway, revealed the need to examine the risks of open public access to high-speed lines. People may be surprised to learn, as I was, that there are well over 100 pedestrian level crossings on the east coast main line.

British Rail firmly believes that it must do everything feasible to improve safety for customers, staff and the public in general. Some people have said that because pedestrians do not endanger trains and their passengers, they should be allowed to take their own risks. The public also count. British Rail is concerned about the safety of people, particularly children, who may be on the line for one reason or another.

Mr. Cryer: When British Rail management were considering all the safety aspects was it moved to consider, for example, providing warning bells activated by an approaching train or warning lights at foot crossings? Or did the high-quality decision makers of British Rail come to the startling conclusion that the only way in which they could tackle the right of people to gain access to the other side of the line—a right enshrined in the original legislation granting authorisation for the railways—was to stop up the whole thing?

Mr. Waller: I note the hon. Gentleman's important point about warning lights, but I hope that he will forgive me if I deal with it later.

Mr. Redmond: The hon. Gentleman has referred to British Rail's passion for safety, and he said that it would bend over backwards to ensure that safety was paramount. That is not the picture of British Rail that I and many other people get. If it is so concerned about safety, why has it delayed dealing with the problem of carriage doors that open, causing people to fall out? That is one example of British Rail's lack of concern about the safety of passengers on its trains. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will slightly temper his comments about British Rail's concern for safety.

Mr. Waller: I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have little patience, and rightly so, if I dealt with the issue of carriage doors now. This Bill has quite different objectives. I accept that that problem is important, but it is being dealt with elsewhere.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Waller: I shall give way again, but I hope that hon. Members will accept that I must then get on with my speech.

Mr. Bennett: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain why high-speed trains have been running on the east coast line for the past 10 years. Until the accident on that line, British Rail had done nothing to make such crossings safer.

Mr. Waller: That is an inaccurate statement. I have visited a number of crossings during my work on the Bill, and I have seen some of the measures taken by British Rail. In the past, it has attempted to use existing legislation to achieve the objectives of the Bill, but without success. It is that failure which promoted the introduction of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Can the hon. Gentleman give me one example to illustrate his claim? I do not believe that there is a single bit of evidence to prove that British Rail has done anything in the past 10 years to close or divert any of the footpaths.

Mr. Waller: That is untrue.

Mr. Bennett: Give me one example.

Mr. Waller: British Rail has sought to use section 119 of the Highways Act 1980 to close or divert crossings, but it has been held——

Mr. Bennett: Where?

Mr. Waller: British Rail attempted to do so at a crossing in Hertfordshire, but it was held that, because section 119 did not cover safety specifically, British Rail was exceeding its powers by seeking to close or divert a crossing. The Ramblers Association has suggested that British Rail is going to unnecessary lengths by using the private Bill procedure to change the law when it could use the existing statute. That is untrue. If that were possible British Rail would have adopted that course. It has

attempted to use existing law, but, because the law does not require that safety factors should be taken into account, that attempt was unsuccessful.

The former chairman of British Rail, Sir Robert Reid, publicly claimed that "no accident is acceptable". British Rail's safety policy document also states that the board is aiming for a reduction in the number of accidents to zero. I am sure that we all applaud that objective. In that context, British Rail believes that many of the 146 crossings on the east coast main line are incompatible with train speeds of 125 mph or more.

For the purposes of the Bill, British Rail has sought to close 10 crossings only—those that are lightly used or offer the public using such crossings a poor sighting of oncoming trains. Those 10 crossings may represent a small proportion of the total, but their closure represents an important step in improving safety and has the major benefit of reducing the stress of drivers who travel the route each day.

Mr. Redmond: The Bill deals with 10 crossings, but there are many more than that on the line. If this compassionate British Rail is so concerned about safety, why have we not got a Bill that seeks to block up the lot of them? I do not believe that British Rail is being consistent. Why has it chosen to close 10 crossings? Why not more?

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman's argument is a curious one. If the Bill had incorporated all the crossings on the line, he would probably complain that we were using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. The board believes that the Bill is an important step towards achieving greater safety. British Rail has singled out those crossings for which the case for closure is strong, either because they are relatively infrequently used or because there are specific dangers—ones that I hope even the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) would recognise were he to travel in the cab of a class 91 locomotive.

When British Rail asked me to speak on its behalf when the Bill reached the House, I asked whether it would be possible for me to travel in the cab of a train on the east coast main line. I did so a few weeks ago. It was a revelation to me just how busy a driver is on such a train for the entire journey. I was also struck by the fact that, if a pedestrian was sighted on the side of the track, the train reached that pedestrian in no time at all. Drivers have extremely nerve-wracking moments every day because they are not absolutely certain of the intentions of pedestrians at the side of the track. It is important to note that ASLEF and the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union are sympathetic to the Bill's objectives.

It takes one and a quarter miles to stop a train when it is travelling at full speed. Bearing in mind the curves in the track as it approaches some crossings, a driver may have just a few hundred yards in which to stop before a person on the line is reached.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: If this Bill is passed, will it be British Rail's intention to introduce a further Bill to work slowly through all the 146 crossings on the east coast main line? Does it intend stop with just 10?

Mr. Waller: It is fair to say that British Rail wants to see the House's response to this Bill. It believes that it is an important step to achieving greater safety. I have already said that it is British Rail's intention to eliminate pedestrian level crossings on high-speed lines. That does not mean that all pedestrian crossings on British Rail's network should be eliminated. Trains travelling at 70 mph are common on other lines, and British Rail has no objection to the continuation of pedestrian crossings on such lines. We are talking about high-speed lines.

Whether further legislative measures have to be taken may depend on any changes that are made by Parliament to the private Bill procedure. However, an illustration of the responsible attitude adopted by British Rail is that it is not prepared to wait for such changes to take place at an unknown date in the future. It is anxious to get on with the job as soon as possible. That is why it is taking this step.

It has been suggested that British Rail is oblivious to the concerns of the users of pedestrian crossings. The reality, I suggest, is far from that. British Rail is currently working with the highways authorities responsible for the 10 locations, where they are willing to co-operate, to try to find suitable diversions for users, where there is evidence of use. Some of these crossings appear to be little used. Indeed, one or two of them appear not to be used at all. It is regrettable that some people object to closure on principle without taking into account the fact that some of these crossings are generally not used at all.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Waller: I shall give way in a moment.

British Rail is confident that in nine out of 10 cases there is a reasonable alternative. I shall give way once more to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure, however, that if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will have the opportunity to make his own speech. I hope that he will restrain himself now, because, with the leave of the House, I hope to be able to respond to some of the points that are raised in the debate.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: If the hon. Gentleman could have answered the points that we put to him, he might have curtailed the debate. If he can establish that people do not use these paths, there are perfectly good procedures under the Highways Act. There is no problem about closing paths if they are not used. It puzzles me, therefore, that British Rail should use this massive parliamentary procedure when it is unnecessary if no one is using the paths. Can the hon. Gentleman therefore tell us which paths are not being used and why British Rail did not ask for their closure on that basis?

Mr. Waller: Under the Highways Act, it is normally a requirement that the highways authority should make the application for closure. Although British Rail has endeavoured to persuade some authorities to move in the direction of either closure or diversion, the difficulties implicit in the relevant sections of the Act have discouraged those authorities from taking such steps. Where there have been any objections, the authorities have generally said that they do not see it as their responsibility to act—that, essentially, the responsibility lies with British Rail. I believe that, in concert with the changes that are to be made to the private Bill procedure, the Highways Act will be altered both to allow British Rail to make applications and to allow safety factors to be taken into account. At present, I am afraid that that is not permitted.

As for the 10 crossings, I have not the slightest doubt that, if the Bill goes into Committee, each of them will be

[Mr. Waller]

dealt with in the minutest detail and that the petitioners against the Bill will produce witnesses to speak about their personal knowledge of usage and of the need for each crossing. I suggest, therefore, that this is not the time to go into detail about the crossings. That can be much better dealt with in Committee.

Mr. Redmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the number of times that the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has given way. However, hon. Members who are here for the debate have a right to be given the details of the Bill. It is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman to say that some Committee elsewhere will go into the Bill in depth and minute detail. Is it not right and proper for the hon. Gentleman to give way if hon. Members wish to raise points now in order to seek clarification of the Bill? Is not that the sensible way forward? I ask for your guidance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly aware of the convention regarding interventions during speeches: it is entirely a matter for the hon. Member who has the Floor. In any case, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has not yet completed his speech. He still has things to say to us. He has already offered to seek the permission of the House to reply to the debate, if that becomes necessary. I understand that both the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are waiting for an opportunity to contribute to the debate. On that basis, perhaps we ought to get on.

Mr. Cryer: On a different point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been to the Private Bill Office, as you know, to look for a further deposit of information by British Rail. Can you confirm that the only information British Rail has provided is through the promoters—in the seventh paragraph of a piece of photocopied paper running to about 150 words? So far as I know, no other printed information has been provided by British Rail. I shall be grateful if you will confirm that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Over a long period I have learnt that my advisers are very reliable and very competent in their professional duties. I have told the House twice already, and I say it for the third time, that I was assured by them that the Bill satisfies all our Standing Order requirements.

Mr. Waller: If the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) chooses to deal with one or more of the individual crossings in depth, that is his right. I shall seek, so far as I am able, to allay his concern. However, I say again that I think that the private Bill procedure provides an opportunity in Committee for these matters to be dealt with in a great deal more detail than can be done on the Floor of the House. If hon. Members are concerned about particular crossings—I recognise that, with some justification, they may have such concerns—I hope that their view would be that the Bill should be allowed a Second Reading so that it exists in principle. If, however, they wish to argue that some of those crossings should be removed from the Bill, in due course the House may decide to move in that direction.

Concern has been expressed tonight that the use of parliamentary powers to close footpath crossings is in some way unusual and undemocratic. I readily accept that the process that we are undertaking is not the ideal solution. The fact that the Government are seeking to amend the Highways Act's references to level crossings reflects that fact. However, hon. Members must take into account the fact that, under the Highways Act 1980, a level crossing may be closed by a local authority order where a more convenient route exists. Regrettably, many local authorities do not regard this as one of their priorities. I suppose that some hon. Members may say that they have many other priorities and limited resources to deal with those priorities. Therefore, closure on the grounds of safety is not provided for, whatever the Ramblers Association may think. Above all, it is for reasons of safety that British Rail is promoting the Bill. Safety appears in its short title. There is no reason to promote the Bill other than on the ground of safety.

I know that many hon. Members agree with the necessity to protect the public, but they would like to see other measures—whether they be footbridges, underpasses or warning lights at crossings—to allow the exact footpath route to be maintained. British Rail would always consider such innovations, where appropriate, but in almost every example in the Bill, the crossings have such a small amount of use that such a formidable investment —we are talking about £200,000 for a footbridge and double that for a subway—cannot be justified. It would be possible to purchase better safety improvements for that money than by providing bridges or subways that inevitably would be little used.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred to warning lights. There are great difficulties with respect to such lights. It has been argued that there is a deterioration in safety if warning lights are used on pedestrian crossings. The time that different kinds of trains take to travel certain distances varies enormously. The five lines at the Carr lane crossing at Doncaster are used by trains which travel at very different speeds. Pedestrians may have seen goods trains passing regularly on the lines. Those pedestrians may not anticipate, when a light is flashing, that an express train travelling at 125 mph is on the line. Pedestrians have often tried to cross lines when lights have begun to flash. At the very least, it would be necessary to incorporate costly equipment that took into account the speed of the train when the lights started to flash. Even then, there would be difficulties and we could argue for some time whether we were building in greater or less safety.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Surely BR could use modern techniques to provide that information. As the hon. Gentleman referred to cost, will he give us some idea of the cost of installing flashing lights at the most used crossings listed in the Bill? I suspect that the cost would not be much greater than the cost of promoting this private Bill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the promotion of private Bills is very expensive.

Mr. Waller: I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a reliable figure about the cost of lights. I can only say that I am sure that we are talking in terms of five figures for some of the most sophisticated lighting systems that he might like to see. The costs cannot be minimised. As I have already said, we could argue whether we would get value for money in terms of greater safety, and no doubt the Committee will address that subject. To some

extent, subjective judgments must prevail and perhaps other hon. Members may want to raise the issue later. I shall be happy to respond.

Where crossings are closed, BR is anxious to pay for necessary improvements to minimise the risk of trespass. There has been some concern about the fact that in one or two cases the stamps of footpaths may remain and people may be encouraged to trespass. British Rail is anxious to prevent that and to talk to local authorities about ways to avoid such occurrences. British Rail will also invest in signing and fencing where diversions have taken place and in some cases it will pay to improve adjacent level crossings.

In the great majority of cases, we are talking about diversions of a few hundred metres at most. In many cases, there are footpaths not far away which would enable the line to be crossed safely via a bridge or subway. With regard to Carr lane in Doncaster, British Rail is anxious to talk to the local authority about a diversion that would provide for an alternative recreational footpath which did not necessitate the crossing of the line. I am sorry to say that, as yet, I understand that Doncaster district council has not been willing to negotiate with BR about that.

Mr. Redmond: May I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as you well know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Doncaster district council is a most reasonable authority and it will, of course, give due consideration to any proposals put forward by BR. However, it will not sell short the residents it represents. The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong to say that Doncaster will not discuss meaningfully any solutions to the problem.

Mr. Waller: I will seek advice, but as I understand it Doncaster district council has not responded favourably to an invitation from BR to discuss an alternative recreational footpath that does not require a level crossing of the line.

Some people would like to picture the Bill as a struggle for and against the freedom of individuals to follow ancient rights of way. The Bill is not about that. I have often spoken in the House in favour of libertarian arguments and I made my maiden speech on such an issue. I am a strong supporter of the Ramblers Association and I enjoy recreational walking. Other things being equal, I would certainly resist the closure of a footpath for anything other than a very important safety reason.

British Rail is not trying to create a precedent; nor is it seeking carte blanche to close every crossing in the country. We are talking essentially about high-speed lines. British Rail is trying to take a meaningful step towards improving public safety on and around high speed rail lines and to prevent a repetition of the tragedy at Carr lane. I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading and that the concerns that have reasonably been expressed can be examined in more detail in Committee.

7.35 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): We should not give the Bill a Second Reading this evening. However, first of all, we should offer sympathy to the families of the young lady and the two children who were killed on the crossing at Carr lane. No matter what we do, we cannot bring those people back to life. There are lessons to be learned from the tragedy, but regrettably BR always seeks to redress problems after the event and not before.

It is no secret that crossings throughout the country have been a source of embarrassment to British Rail for some years, but BR appears to have taken no action. The young lady and the two children who were killed on that crossing were your constituents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the crossing is in my constituency. The young lady and the two children were killed as they crossed the line to visit Potteric Carr, a well-known nature reserve which has been a source of enjoyment for many people in Doncaster and the surrounding area. That nature reserve is well managed, well used and much appreciated by the public. The crossing's closure will end a source of enjoyment for people who live on the east side of the crossing.

There is a large housing development on the east side of the railway, and there are obviously lots of children as well as adults on that new housing estate. It should therefore be appropriate for BR to ensure that the crossing is safe for the general public to use to cross from the east side of the line to the west side to enjoy Potteric Carr.

Having read British Rail's proposals, the House should consider fetching British Rail representatives—Bob Reid in particular—to the Bar of the House and finding them guilty of bringing the House into disrepute. According to documentation in support of the Bill, there does not appear to be a problem, because a number of authorities have expressed their willingness to adopt British Rail's proposals. British Rail has said that Doncaster is quite willing to discuss the matter and find a solution. If British Rail is not bloody-minded, discussions can take place and agreement can be reached.

Why is British Rail wasting the time of the House and wasting public money? After all, the public provide British Rail with the money to pay the promoters fat fees to pilot the Bill through the House. That is why British Rail should be charged with bringing the House into disrepute.

Mr. Cryer: In view of British Rail's new-found concern with safety after the Clapham junction accident, one wonders why it did not take into account the provision of bridges at level crossings, such as the one that provides access to Potteric Carr, when it sought investment for the electrification of the line. If, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) suggested, it is a bridleway and therefore exists for greater usage than a footpath, that should have been taken into account in estimating the cost of the construction of an appropriate bridge. British Rail surely must have known—it was not a secret—that, after electrification, trains would be travelling at 125 mph or faster.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. One can sum it up—British Rail does not give a damn about the general public's attitude. It is quite willing to forgo anything to save money.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I should hate my hon. Friend to think that I shall stand here tonight as a defender of British Rail and all its works—I have fallen out with British Rail probably more than he has over the years. However, my hon. Friend will recollect that the investment case for the east coast main line electrification spent considerable time on Tory Ministers' desks. The case was gone through with the proverbial fine-toothed comb. My hon. Friend will know that, when it was approved, like other investment schemes it had to generate a 7 per cent. return—it is now 8 per cent.—on the money invested. Given the draconian rules that the Government themselves

[Mr. Peter Snape]

have laid down, to add another £0·25 million to provide a bridleway over the five newly electrified tracks in my hon. Friend's constituency may have led to civil servants either delaying approval even longer or rejecting the scheme altogether.

Mr. Redmond: I am most grateful for that enlightenment. Regrettably, it does not change my attitude to British Rail. I accept that the Government have placed many restrictions on British Rail. However, if they were sufficient men, British Rail executives could have said to the Government, "We require X amount to cover not only the electrification but the additional safety measures." The Government continue to say that safety is paramount and that money is no object.

If the board members of British Rail had said, "We intend to resign to highlight the problem of safety and Government money," they might have received that extra money. I am certain that the Government would not have wanted to be exposed for their appalling track record in dishing out money and, in effect, saying, "Do as we say, not as we do." The Government appear not to react until there is a disaster and lives are lost. We then see crocodile tears and some poor track signalman being blamed for failing to carry out his job, when the equipment may leave a lot to be desired.

Mr. Cryer: I entirely agree with the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) that the responsibility rests heavily on the Government's shoulders in controlling investment by British Rail so rigidly and tightly, to the detriment of the travelling public. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if an amount had been included for safety features, British Rail management would have had an important and bold advantage in propaganda terms if the Government had said, "That is a superfluous luxury; we are not prepared to invest in safety"? One of the difficulties is that BR top management always seems a little too supinely to accept the dictates of the Government.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes his point well. Regrettably, British Rail management will not stand up and be counted until an accident occurs. British Rail then blames all and sundry bar its own neglect. The Government would not be inclined to refuse to give British Rail money for safety improvements; they would not take that risk. British Rail is refusing to demand money to guarantee the safety not only of passengers and crews but of people who need to cross railways for a variety of reasons, as they have done over the centuries.

I entirely accept what was said about having more knowledge about British Rail and an understanding of finances. However, I am still entitled to my opinion that British Rail does not appear to seek to avoid accidents, because it will not demand money to guarantee safe public transport until after an accident such as the one at Carr. It has come up with a blanket proposal not to consider what the public require but deliberately to say, "We are not interested in a solution." If it was interested in a solution, it would allow ample time for discussions and would be prepared to ensure that money was spent to continue access to the other side of the railway. It appears that it is not interested in that, and I cannot understand why.

Everyone is aware of the environment and green issues. Surely children on the east side of the line can learn better to appreciate the environment if they go to a nature reserve such as Potteric Carr on the other side of the line. Children can develop an appreciation of nature and the wilderness, which will stay with them throughout their lives.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): My hon. Friend made a point about the Government and British Rail seeking to rectify safety aspects after a tragedy. Peculiarly, in this case British Rail has taken a different tack. In respect of Clapham junction and King's Cross, the relevant Minister said, "We have a bottomless purse for safety." In this case, it is promoting a private Bill to minimise the cost of protecting the general public from high-speed trains.

Why, in this case, are British Rail and the Government not taking the line that there is no limitation on expenditure on safety? Why the change? I suggest that the change is that British Rail is not too worried about protecting the general public. It may rightly be more worried about protecting its passengers. Only when the Minister of State, Department of Transport goes to the scene of a disaster, with all the attendant publicity, are millions of pounds spent on rectifying what ought to have been right in the first place.

Mr. Redmond: I know that the Minister was listening intently to what my hon. Friend said. I feel sure that, when he tells us the Government's stance on the Bill, he will give in great detail the clarification that my hon. Friend wants. I have every confidence, in view of the Government's track record, that my hon. Friend will receive no clarification, but nevertheless it is better to ask.

British Rail appears to be seeking to mislead the House. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) said that he had had the opportunity to travel on one of the high-speed trains. He forgot to mention, or I did not hear, what section of the line he had travelled on. He may have travelled from Leeds to King's Cross to get the whole picture. All that he needs to do is to nod his head. Would he like to say——

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Get on with it.

Mr. Redmond: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I am happy to give way.

Mr. Bottomley: I was hoping to make a speech, but at this rate there may not be time.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being in the House, but I am seeking to make my objections, as I think that they ought to be made, although that may not please the hon. Gentleman. He should have persuaded his Government to cough up some money in the past. The hon. Gentleman is a previous Transport Minister. It is no wonder that he is feeling irritable about the criticism of Government spending.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman invited me to say what I wanted to say, which was that I hoped to make a speech. The only reason why I was muttering, perhaps more loudly that I should have been, was that the hon. Gentleman seemed to be inviting other hon. Members to intervene in his speech. Would it not be a good idea if he returned to his point, which may be a fair one, and then allowed others to speak?

Mr. Redmond: It pleases me no end that the hon. Gentleman is feeling irritable.

The hon. Member for Keighley said that he had had the opportunity to ride with the driver on a high-speed train. It could have been for a short or a long distance. The more experience one has as a passenger in the cab of a 125 train, the better one can judge. The hon. Gentleman said that he had driven once in the cab. Many drivers do the journey from Doncaster to King's Cross in one hour 40 minutes. There is every possibility that that time will be reduced to one hour 30 minutes. The trains will be travelling faster, so there is more need for safety.

I take second place to no one in the Chamber on safety. If anyone wants to check my track record, I sat on the Doncaster coal board area safety committee. When I was on the committee, the number of accidents declined year in and year out. I was proud of that track record. I am interested in safety, and I want safety for not only the cab drivers and passengers but the people who need to cross the lines. It appears that the penny-pinching attitude of British Rail will deprive many of your constituents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and certainly many of my constituents, of access to Potteric Carr.

I hope that, even at this late stage, the hon. Member for Keighley will seek leave to withdraw the Bill, to enable us to have fruitful discussions and arrive at a sensible solution. British Rail's proposals are not sensible.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman asked me a direct question about the routes on which I travelled. I travelled from London to Doncaster and visited the site of the crossing at Cantley where the lady and two children were killed. There is no doubt that the drivers in the cab, who have great experience, would be pleased to see the measures in the Bill enacted.

As the hon. Gentleman asked me a question, perhaps I could put one to him. Is he aware of the short time that is available to a driver travelling at 125 mph before the train reaches the Carr lane crossing in his constituency? If he is not aware, perhaps I could enlighten him when I respond to the debate, if I am able to do so.

Mr. Redmond: I do not know the exact time, but we are talking about seconds, not minutes.

Mr. Waller: It is about six or seven seconds.

Mr. Redmond: I accept that the driver has little opportunity to brake in time to avoid anyone on the lines. It is for that reason that I would support any sensible measures that would bring about a safety improvement at that crossing.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Does my hon. Friend accept that the essence of the Bill, according to the sponsor and to British Rail, is safety aspects of British Rail's operations on the east coast line? May I give my hon. Friend an example from my constituency? An accident took place some considerable time ago—by which I mean about 15 months ago. A young girl, one of my constituents, was killed on a level crossing on the Newcastle-Sunderland line at Newton Garths.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport and I contacted British Rail and the local authority. Everyone, including the residents who live adjacent to the crossing, wants the crossing to be closed. British Rail could close that crossing without coming to the House with a private Bill. It could close it tomorrow if it wanted to do so. All that I am getting from British Rail is procrastination.

I want to avoid another accident at Newton Garths level crossing. Children cross the line to go from Biddick hall estate to Boldon comprehensive school. In the not-too-distant future, there could be another fatal accident. In the meantime, British Rail is doing nothing. It cannot be very worried about safety.

Mr. Redmond: Could my hon. Friend ciarify which crossing in the Bill he is referring to?

Mr. Dixon: My point is that the Bill deals with 10 crossings on the high-speed line. British Rail is introducing a Bill under the private procedure to close 10 crossings. I am giving my hon. Friend an instance of where British Rail could close a crossing with the support of the residents and the local authority, without the need to introduce a private Bill. If it is worried about safety, British Rail could close the crossing tomorrow.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend has helped to clarify the point that I made earlier. British Rail is not consistent on safety aspects. It is an absolute scandal. The crossing to which my hon. Friend refers is still there, apparently in spite of everyone agreeing that it should be closed.

The hon. Member for Keighley said that British Rail already had sufficient power to close a crossing. Obviously, it means holding consultations and, again, British Rail appears not to be interested in discussing the best ways of finding a solution. Instead, it is using the draconian measure of this private Bill as a sledgehammer to ensure that it gets its way and to hell with anything else.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, for the crossing in his constituency which concerns him and which gives access to Potteric Carr, it is within the jurisdiction of British Rail to put a permanent speed limit on the section to reduce any possible hazard? It may add on an extra minute's journey time, but as most trains wait at stations because they move so briskly between stations, it would not increase the overall journey time. If there is anxiety, a permanent way speed restriction could operate. That would demonstrate British Rail's concern about safety and underpin this application to the House.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Last night, I got on a train at Doncaster which was stuck in the station for 15 minutes waiting to leave. Regrettably, it did not leave until it had stood for 16 minutes waiting for an Edinburgh train which for some reason had been delayed up north. If British Rail is so concerned about safety, to shut it down altogether is the ultimate safety measure, but that is not a practicable solution. The solution could be backed up by the expenditure of a little money.

While we are talking about safety and avoiding the cul-de-sacs that the letter from the promoters of the Bill mentions, it occurs to me that I do not know how we would stop kids crossing the line. As a little boy, I used to cross from our village to the other side of the line because there was more of an adventure playground on the other side. The same is probably true in this case. Most kids are averse to bath water, but they are certainly not averse to playing in water for recreational purposes. I can visualise a whole host of children trying to cross the line, certainly not accompanied by an adult because an adult would not

[Mr. Redmond]

allow a trespass. Given our high-speed trains and the fact that they will get speedier in future, there is a great danger to children.

We spend millions of pounds promoting pelican crossings. Children are advised to go to a pelican crossing, press the button and wait for the lights to change before crossing the road. Ladies assist children to cross roads. From nursery school onwards, children are taught to go to the appropriate crossing point. If British Rail is seriously interested in safety, it would be beneficial to provide some sort of crossing, with the necessary lights and all the signal equipment alongside the line.

I certainly do not accept British Rail's figure of £25,000 for the installation of a lights warning system. I do not know what price British Rail puts on the life of a child or an adult, but human life is priceless. In future, there will certainly be accidents at this spot unless a sensible safety measure is taken.

It is in the hands of British Rail to ensure that there is a crossing that children can use safely. As I have said, when I was a youngster wanting to cross the line, although we knew that we were trespassing on British Rail land, first we made sure that the village constable was nowhere in sight and then that there were no trains on the line. In those days, the highest speed of steam engines was about 90 mph, so we had ample time to scamper across and get up to those things which lads get up to. That is bound to take place today.

I am asking British Rail to ensure that there is a suitable crossing for my constituents and, possibly, for those of the hon. Member for Keighley. He said that he had a loose association with the Ramblers Association. Obviously, many of his constituents also enjoy walks in the country and the environment of a nature reserve. It would be quite consistent for the two to marry, but they can do so only if costs are thrown out of the window. Obviously, £20,000 would provide an adequate crossing.

The alternatives that are cited include a conventional footpath costing £175,000, one suitable for cycles, prams and wheelchairs costing £220,000, or tunnels through an embankment from a main road costing £400,000. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain further how British Rail reaches those figures. Those high costs are certainly beyond me.

I know many lads who work at Rossington pit and a hell of a lot who used to do excellent tunnelling for British Coal. I feel sure that they could construct a tunnel for a damn sight less than the sum that British Rail is quoting, and do a damn good job. Of course, that would have one disadvantage for British Rail—it would maintain accessibility from one side of the line to the other. British Rail is willing to spend £2,500, or even £10,000, to block public access. The fact that British Rail will continue to push to get this Bill through the House, when it should be talking to the relevant local authorities about reaching agreement, leaves a little to be desired.

The hon. Member for Keighley said that agreement had been reached with some of the local authorities affected for access to be stopped or an alternative found. If such marvellous progress is being made, I cannot understand why British Rail is being so bloody-minded in seeking to deprive many of our constituents who live on the east side of the line from enjoying what is on the west side. I hope that the hon. Member for Keighley will seek to provide a suitable alternative this evening. Although that presents problems, I hope that a solution will be found.

Several petitions have been presented against the Bill. I hope that British Rail will take cognisance of the authorities that have petitioned, even if they do so only to find a sensible solution and because they are interested in safety. British Rail appears to be considering only the cost involved and not the enjoyment that people could have from such crossings.

As several other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall give them the opportunity to do so. Suffice it to say that local authorities already have the power to stop the Bill going through unless British Rail shows that it is interested in seeking a solution to the problem. That does not appear to be the case, and I shall listen intently to the hon. Member for Keighley when he winds up the debate to see whether he answers some of my questions. British Rail can avoid the use of this valuable time in the House by seeking more sensible solutions from local authorities.

8.12 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The House will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if you were not in the Chair you would be contributing to the debate and holding the attention of everyone here.

I wish to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) that when people die unnecessarily on the railways, the House should be concerned and the relevant Members should be present at debates such as this. The House understands why the hon. Member for Don Valley feels so strongly about safety and retaining access from one side of the railway line to the other.

The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon)—*[Interruption.]*—who is trying to interrupt me, should allow me to respond to the point that he made in an intervention. He argued for stopping up footpaths on another line. It was a fair and valuable point to make on Second Reading, and I am sure that the promoters of the Bill will see what can be done to solve the problem in his constituency. An advantage of single-Member constituencies is that Members of Parliament are aware of every transport and housing problem in their constituencies. For example, I have been campaigning for many years for a replacement footbridge above the New Eltham line at Middle Park. Although I can take up the matter directly with British Rail, it is justified and in order to mention that within the context of the Bill, without going into detail.

The problem that the House is presenting to British Rail might be described as being presented with extravagant language. To argue that British Rail—its staff, its board and everyone who works in it—is not interested in safety is to contradict the facts. People are not perfect, and neither is British Rail, but it is worth noting that, if all the distance travelled on the roads was travelled on the railways, there would not be 5,500 killed but 150. The railway is much safer than aeroplanes, and aeroplanes are much safer than roads. If we paid as much attention to saving the lives of pedestrians away from the railway lines as we are rightly paying to protect the lives of those who wish to use the footpaths and bridleways across railway lines, we should have a potential 1,700 lives a year to save.

Naturally, British Rail and the Government must decide how much money to make available. British Rail must make safety decisions. Although its safety record has been improving in the past few years, there are many other ways in which it can spend money. When I was a junior Minister and in contact with British Rail, it was spending money on the problem of bridge bashing. An open report published on the problem considered the chances of a serious loss of life and injury if a bridge were carried away by a heavy goods vehicle. People sometimes drive loads that are too high, or tipper trucks with the forks up, under a low bridge, risking a train falling down on a road. Conversely, a vehicle could go through a guard rail and land on a railway line when an express train was passing.

British Rail must decide how to reduce risks and achieve the greatest benefit in terms of safety and improving the service. Indirectly, there are many lives to be saved if people switched from travelling by road to travelling by rail. The hon. Member for Don Valley referred to the time that it takes for British Rail to go from Doncaster to London and vice versa. He spoke of the possibility of saving an extra 10 minutes, which is one of the answers to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who suggested that trains should slow down to give them enough time to stop, where at present there is a six second interval between seeing and crossing level crossings. If British Rail were to slow down their trains at each of the 140 footpaths on the east coast main line, everybody would travel by car or even walk, which might be faster.

We must have not the best compromise but the quickest gain in safety. I hope that those who will take the opportunity to object to and speak on the Bill will not prevent it from receiving a Second Reading. If that happens, it will be difficult for those in British Rail who want urgently to reduce avoidable risks to say, "Let's go to Parliament as soon as possible to get all the improvements that we can, whether or not we face pressures to improve the safety of crossings of unused or unnecessary footpaths in Jarrow, Eltham or elsewhere".

They must take decisions and they have decided to come to the House for powers that, in the future, may be analagous to those of a highway authority, enabling BR to stop up footpaths or make diversions.

Mr. Redmond: No one is opposed to improving safety. Nor does anyone wish to restrict safety measures that will, in theory, save lives, pain and suffering. The Bill seeks to empower British Railways to stop up 10 level crossings and, given that there are many more on the east coast line, it will be better and quicker if British Rail met the local authorities concerned with an open mind on how to find a solution. That has not happened in any of the cases mentioned in the Bill.

Mr. Bottomley: I am not trying to take up all the measures mentioned in the Bill but to do what hon. Members should do—push for safety and improvement as soon as possible. It appears that British Rail could have included other lines and other footpaths in the Bill and there have been interventions to that effect. It also appears that, of the 10 put forward, nine are not controversial. Regarding the tenth, the promoters' statement says:

> "The board are . . . endeavouring to discuss with the highway authority concerned"

and endeavouring to find a

> "proposal to put to the highway authority".

It would be sad if it happened, but if the House did not give the Bill a Second Reading, we would not only lose the nine cases on which there appears to be agreement—or, at least, a willingness to let the Bill proceed to Committee—but we might find that the pressure normally pressing a Bill towards Committee was removed.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): We all agree that we should legislate to improve public safety, but there are other considerations contained in the Bill. One is the wholesale way in which British Rail wishes to deal with the problem that has up to now been dealt with piecemeal. Another consideration involves access to the countryside. The Bill creates huge no-go areas up and down the country and has the potential to apply them to other districts. That would deny access to the countryside to many people who currently enjoy it. There is a risk involved, but the measure should include British Rail improving the system with audible warnings of the approach of trains, even those travelling at 125 mph—that must be technically possible. We cannot legislate for 100 per cent. safety for the public, but must let them use their own judgment on the risk. Therefore, we should consider that objection to the Bill as well as the issue of public safety.

Mr. Bottomley: I think that my hon. Friend will enjoy his time in Committee. I think that he has just made a point that could well be made in Committee.

We could make the same argument about a footpath across an airport runway, where aeroplanes may be approaching at 125 mph on landing or take off. When put that way, the argument seems laughable. If we were talking about trains going at 55 mph or some comparable speed, where there has been no significant change over the years, either in the frequency of trains—which, on the east coast line, is limited—or in the increase of their speed—which has been pretty dramatic—and if there were no prospect of a further increase in speed, we could perhaps tell people to accept the risk that they had accepted in the past. However, when speed is increased, the risk and danger are increased. As we increase the number of trains using a line, we increase the danger. That was tragically shown even on lines that are not on the east coast main line, where there were deaths that could have been avoided.

I do not want to delay the House——

Mr. Redmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bottomley: No, I am sorry I shall not. I listened to the hon. Gentleman for 35 minutes and, if he will forgive me, I should like to wind up.

Mr. Redmond: The hon. Gentleman is misleading the House.

Mr. Bottomley: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman if I have misled the House, because I shall want to withdraw what I said.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman said that agreement had been reached on nine out of the 10 cases. According to the document, it appears that British Rail has reached some sort of agreement or found some solution. It states that there will be no objections to some of the footpaths across railway lines being closed. I gather that everyone present this evening is interested in safety, and if British Rail is interested in safety, it should realise that provisions already exist within local authorities. It would speed things

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up if British Rail were to come to an agreement with the local authorities. We would not even have to wait for a Bill to go through the House. If British Rail is interested in safety, it should approach local authorities and use existing powers.

Mr. Bottomley: There is always a different way of doing things, and there is nearly always a Member of Parliament who will argue for a different way. We should be asking whether we can act today to let the Bill progress to Committee. I shall vote for that if it comes to it. I am not suggesting that there are not problems with any of the other cases, but the problem with the one to which the hon. Member for Don Valley referred is not as major as he makes out.

I was pleased that, during my time at the Department of Transport, capital investment in railways was increasing. We should be careful about dragging too many party political comparisons into the debate. I checked the figures for London Underground recently and discovered that, in the year following the Labour party's "Fares Fair" policy, capital investment fell when everyone thought that it should go up. I am pleased that investment in London Underground has doubled and doubled again since then.

Most of the public support for British Rail has been running at a higher level than that for the national roads programme. When people start considering whether cars should, by law, be allowed to travel faster than 70 mph, one of the reasonable arguments against a 90 mph speed limit is that roads are too crowded and the risk of more crashes would be too great. We should hold the speed limit for cars and allow faster and faster trains to be developed, so that the relative advantages of the railways become more obvious to more people. I hope that we shall not lift the 70 mph speed limit on roads and I hope that the Bill will be given a Second Reading. We should look for higher standards of safety, not accept those that were acceptable in the past.

8.26 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I agree with the case against raising the 70 mph speed limit and the case for chanelling high-speed traffic and a great deal of freight by rail.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) I thought that the Bill should be called the "Wrong Side of the Tracks Bill"—closing off the delights of the east to those living on the west. His descriptions were so alluring that I thought that I should pay a rapid visit to his constituency. I have often admired Potteric Carr as the train goes through—not always at high speed because there are often delays there.

It was intriguing to discover how we have come to have a separate East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill. The British Railways (No. 2) Bill already before the House contains similar measures in respect of two level crossings in Kent and Cumbria. There was an intriguing article in the most recent issue of *Modern Railways* on the review of current railway legislation. It stated that the British Railways board had sought powers in respect of the east coast main line by means of a separate Bill in the hope that the less emotive general powers Bill would not be delayed by petitions against this Bill.

We are spending an evening discussing a Bill that one hon. Member believes should be pressed ahead with separately because we have been shunted into a siding. The operation is being considered separately in the hope that it will not delay other British Railways legislation before the House. The article mentions that the Ramblers Association, the British Horse Society and the Open Spaces Society have lodged a joint petition opposing the principle of footpath closures by a private Bill. It referred to objections received from Durham and Nottingham county councils and Doncaster borough council.

We set the legislation in context when we reflect that its subject matter could have been dealt with by other legislation already before the House. Those of us who represent different parts of the east coast main line were surprised when the Bill appeared, in light of the spate of other British Railways Bills before the House.

The Bill specifically refers to a series of crossings on the east coast main line, one of which was the scene of a tragic, but rare, accident. As the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said, the accident record of pedestrians involved with moving vehicles on the roads is infinitely worse than anything we can imagine on railways. That does not remove the case for trying to do something about circumstances such as those that led to the Potteric Carr tragedy, but there are many options to consider when dealing with the safety problems of pedestrian crossings on fast railway lines. Those options include footbridges, underpasses, warning lights, gates or barriers that are automatically controlled using the same principles applied to the modernisation of road level crossings up and down the line, where modern technology is used to ensure that a barrier falls and lights flash in ample time to deal with the rapid speed of trains.

All the arguments that we have heard about how little time the train crew has to see what is happening and how quickly the train will reach the crossing, apply equally to road crossings up and down the east coast main line that are currently being modernised.

Another option is to close the footpath where the crossing is not used. It is alleged that some footpaths fall within that category. However, that could be done under existing procedure.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: If paths are not used, they cannot present a safety problem.

Mr. Beith: I suppose the safety problem is a theoretical one. People might look at a route on a map and decide to try to follow it, not realising the danger that they were putting themselves in. I accept that, if a footpath clearly were not used, that theoretical danger could be removed by following existing procedures.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: One of the problems about this closure is that one cannot erase the public right of way from all the ordnance survey maps that are likely to be in use for many years.

Mr. Beith: That is one of the problems about closing any footpath. I do not like to see footpaths closed, but I am at least prepared to consider a case. What I do not want is the development of a new practice whereby footpaths are closed by way of private Bills. Every so often, British Rail might come along and close several more footpaths outside the normal procedures available under the highways authority, which I should prefer to see

used. I hope that those procedures will continue to lead to very few closures. Indeed, it is the fact that they have led to very few closures that has brought British Rail before the House with this Bill.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that footpaths should not be stopped up and pedestrians made to go unnecessarily on long detours. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not saying that footpaths across high-speed lines should be allowed to continue. The whole House should say very clearly that we must find ways of getting rid of these private paths across high-speed lines—in some cases by the construction of a bridge or tunnel, and in others by diversion. We must give strong support to British Rail—management, staff and unions—in the elimination of unnecessary risks as soon as that is reasonably practicable.

Mr. Beith: I have listed a series of options for dealing with this problem. Some involve separating pedestrians from high-speed trains by means of footbridges or underpasses, and some involve the same technology as has to be used to enable cars to pass over a line. We are not talking about a line that can be isolated from all crossing traffic. That is accepted. There are vehicle level crossings, which in most cases are used more frequently and pose a greater risk of accident. The technology has to be developed to make those crossings safe. That is what is being done up and down the east coast main line.

Mr. Snape *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I must give up the habit of allowing regular interventions, but I cannot deny the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) his opportunity.

Mr. Snape: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for my opportunity. He has—in typically artful and typically Liberal fashion, if I may say so—managed to sketch out all the options that are open to British Rail. With reference in particular to the controversial crossing about which we have heard so much tonight, can the hon. Gentleman tell the House which option he would plump for? Does he think that the bill—and, according to British Rail, a bridleway, rather than a footpath, would cost £250,000—could be met by British Rail under the existing investment rules?

Mr. Beith: I am not qualified to say which is the best option. That is very much a decision for the local people. It is particularly Liberal to say that local people should make the decision. Indeed, that is a very strong Liberal principle. It is obvious to all concerned that one of the things involved is access to a much-valued nature reserve, which has become increasingly popular and which, incidentally, was created by the structure of the railway system, which gave that piece of undisturbed land its special quality.

The notion that we should have a Bill before Parliament to deal with one crossing becomes even more absurd if, simply because British Rail has not so far managed to reach agreement with Doncaster borough council on the best option for this crossing, we must have not just a clause in another Bill but a clause in this Bill, so that the argument about Doncaster borough council will not delay the British Rail (No. 1) Bill. We seem to be entering an "Alice in Wonderland" world, where decisions are taken for the most extraordinary reasons.

But the Bill has other odd features, to which I referred earlier when the Chairman of Ways and Means was in the Chair. At that point I asked him about the Leamside branch railway. All the crossings referred to in this Bill, except one, are on the east coast main line, as the title suggests. In one case there is a reference to a loop off that line. There is a footpath that crosses both the Leamside branch railway and the main line. I still do not understand how that can be within the ambit of the Bill. One of the most obvious things about the Leamside branch railway is that it is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a high-speed line on which trains can travel at 125 or 140 mph. Most hon. Members who travel from and to the north-east know that. From time to time, we travel on the Leamside branch railway. But one travels on that railway only if a train has been diverted off the east coast main line because of breakdown or for purposes of signalling work. Indeed, we are experiencing a lot of that sort of thing now—especially signalling work.

On Saturday, I had a very pleasant tour round Eaglescliff for exactly that reason. In Northumberland, it is not possible to divert in that way once a train passes the Blyth and Tyne diversion, as there is only one main line. Signalling work there seems to be very protracted. Every time it is completed, someone comes along and takes away several miles of cable. This has become an extremely regular occurrence. It is time British Rail developed some new security procedures for its cabling. Certainly, a great deal of disruption is being caused on that line. So we have become used to travelling on lines like the Leamside. Invariably, a journey on that line drastically reduces the speed of the train and adds greatly to the time of the journey—pleasant though it is, now and then, to look at the less disturbed part of the Durham countryside.

However, it is pretty difficult to advance the same argument in respect of the crossing over that branch line as is advanced in respect of the east coast main line. That is quite apart from the procedural puzzle of the inclusion of this in a Bill that does not apply to any other line, and it is not possible to make it the subject of the same arguments.

At the heart of the objection to this Bill—most of us will have received correspondence from organisations representing ramblers and riders—is the feeling that this is only the beginning and that this legislation will lead to the closing up of crossings by other private legislation. It is felt that, if British Rail is allowed to do this once, it will want to do it again. It is felt that it will come before us with another Bill, or that it will want to have something included in a general Bill. Some would say that British Rail will try to get a more general power to treat crossings in this way, or that frequent Bills listing crossings for closure will come before us. That is why some of the objections to the Bill go far beyond the objections to some of these crossings and refer to lines travelling through entirely different areas. It is felt that this would be a dangerous and damaging precedent, as well as a procedure that would lead to the closure, without any redress, of some crossings that are currently in use.

British Rail is not always very conscious of or careful about footpaths. Before coming into the House for this debate, I was going through the day's correspondence. I read a whole series of reports from footpaths officers in my constituency. The southern end of a footpath about which I have had to complain on behalf of a constituent in the parish of Adderstone-with-Lucker has been obstructed by

[Mr. Beith]

British Rail. The footpaths officer has taken up the matter with the area engineer at York. The obstruction seems to have been caused not by the line but in the course of some other British Rail activity. It is a common feeling among ramblers and others who love to walk on our great network of footpaths that British Rail and all sorts of other organisations think last about footpaths. Footpaths are not high on its list of priorities.

We all know that the enforcement activities of local authorities in their attempts to keep footpaths open are stretched far beyond the limits. I discovered a difficulty in my constituency. The principal footpaths officer had been off for more than a year, and his one assistant was struggling to keep up with a deluge of complaints of this sort. Ramblers understandably feel that everybody is against them. They have to fight every inch of the way to keep footpaths open. Then they find that legislation going through Parliament bypasses all the normal procedures, closes a whole series of crossings, and opens up the possibility that the same technique will be used in the future.

It has been said several times in this debate that pedestrian crossings over high-speed lines should be eliminated. If that is the objective, the number of footpaths around the country likely to be closed is very large. The high-speed trunk lines that run through the country—the east coast main line, the west coast main line, the lines down to the west country and south Wales—intersect a great many footpaths. If this is to be the principle, our footpath network will be drastically carved up—hence the anxiety of many of those who have raised objections to the Bill.

I move on to another curious factor which I had not appreciated until some recent correspondence with British Rail. As the House will know, I have been involved in extensive arguments with British Rail about sleeper services to the north-east of England and the borders, in the course of which it emerged that British Rail has a new policy on the maintenance of the east coast main line. British Rail has, according to the chairman,

"taken delivery of new maintenance equipment and are now planning to carry out much of the work on weekday nights rather than disrupting journeys at weekends. Overnight closure of one route offers substantial benefits of lower staffing costs and more efficient management of engineering work."

He is referring to the east coast main line, which it appears will be closed down completely at night.

There are some mysteries about this. I do not understand how regular freight traffic will continue to operate or how the planned Edinburgh-Newcastle-Paris-Brussels sleeper will make its way to the channel tunnel overnight as intended. But the chairman of British Rail says that instead of closing the east coast main line for periods during the day at weekends—or rather of delaying trains on it—the line will be completely closed, allowing maintenance crews to take possession and get on with their work. If so, there will be times of daylight in the late summer nights and early mornings when the line is closed, and there will be no reason why people should not use the footpaths if warning lights and so on are provided.

During the early stages of the argument this idea of overnight closure was advanced and then dismissed, but it has clearly emerged again as a major factor in British Rail's thinking about the future of the east coast main line, and in a debate such as this we should be told whether there will be periods during the 24 hours, when the line is not operating regularly or at intervals and is closed to all traffic, when it will be reasonably safe and when properly arranged pedestrian crossings could be used.

Mr. Snape: Does the hon. Gentleman anticipate many ramblers wandering across the line between midnight and 6 am, whether or not it is closed?

Mr. Beith: People cross the lines in the early morning when they want to look at, for instance, a nature reserve. The best time to do that is at 5 or 6 o'clock on a summer morning, when they can hear the dawn chorus and see the birds. Keen enthusiasts go to places such as Potteric Carr at that time of day.

There is another reason why such issues must be raised in the context of this Bill and it concerns the basis on which its promoters ask us to allow the Bill to proceed to Second Reading. The promoters in their statement mention the discussions that they have had with the highway authorities:

"The board are discussing or endeavouring to discuss with the highway authorities concerned with each crossing the possibility of diversionary or alternative routes for the ways in question . . . in all other cases"—

except the Potteric Carr case—

"possible diversionary or alternative routes have been devised and are being discussed with the highway authority."

On that basis, the board says that we should let the Bill go ahead—all these matters can be settled out of court, as it were.

I have some experience of trying to "settle out of court" with British Rail on the basis of understandings which should mean that we let the Bill proceed. When a previous British Rail Bill was under discussion at a similar stage, British Rail gave an undertaking that it would restore overnight services on the east coast line in 1991, if the results of a study that it was going to carry out were satisfactory. That undertaking has not been kept. British Rail is still refusing to restore sleeper services to the east coast main line, thus depriving Newcastle, Tyneside, Teesside and the borders of sleeper services or any overnight services to London.

British Rail has done this on the basis of information that has not changed anything to the advantage of its case in the meantime. But when the undertaking was given and reported to the House, Members thought it reasonable to allow the legislation then under discussion to proceed. British Rail is asking us to do the same tonight on the grounds that it is likely to be possible to arrive at alternative arrangements for many of these footpaths. Hon. Members are asked to take account of such arrangements and of the possibility that they will be fully honoured, and to allow the Bill to proceed.

My advice to Hon. Members is not to believe British Rail's assurances in circumstances such as these. My experience is that it does not keep them. It will give assurances designed to assist the Bill's passage, but it will ensure that they are not so precise as to be absolutely enforceable; and if it suits British Rail, it will seek a means of backing out of their implications later. If we allow the Bill to go ahead tonight, some of the agreements with local authorities may not work out or may break down, and the procedure under this Bill may be used to the full to close these footpaths.

Experience of the east coast main line sleeper services should teach Members—I include myself in this—to view British Rail's assurances with the greatest circumspection. If parliamentary procedures allow us to tie British Rail down more tightly, we should do that. If the procedures that British Rail seeks to put through Parliament reduce the rights of the public to get their point of view across and to object, we should be very suspicious of those procedures. If we allow the Bill through, a whole new way of closing footpaths will exist and the arrangements with other authorities may not work out. That is an insufficient basis on which to proceed.

8.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It may be helpful at this point if I give the House the Government's view on the Bill.

At present the promotion of a private Bill is the only means available to British Rail to secure the stopping up or diversion of rights of way across a railway on grounds of public safety. In view of British Rail's statutory duty to operate its railways safely, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State decided, when asked for his consent to deposit the Bill, that it was reasonable for him to give it so that British Rail could have its proposals tested before Parliament. It must be right that there should be a method of considering whether it is in the public interest that footpaths should be stopped up.

The Government remain neutral on the merits or otherwise of the detailed proposals; that must be a matter for the Select Committee if the Bill is given a Second Reading. It will be for British Rail to demonstrate to Parliament that it has looked carefully at the amount of public use made of these level crossings, at the scope for establishing alternative routes across the railway, and at the possibility of using safety devices to keep the existing crossings open.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I am sure that the Minister does not want to mislead the House. The Ramblers Association states that British Rail applied for a closure in Taunton Deane on the grounds of safety—and got it under present legislation. How was it possible to obtain the closure of a footpath across a railway on the grounds of safety when the Minister has just said that that is impossible? I also wonder whether he can tell us the outcome of the railway inspectorate's inquiry into safety at level crossings, especially pedestrian crossings.

Mr. McLoughlin: I can say only that the information that I have just given is correct—this is currently the only way for British Rail to proceed. As for the inspectorate's reports, those documents are published when available and it is open to members of the Select Committee and to petitioners to make the relevant case.

Mr. Cryer: Is the Minister saying that the railway inspectorate is conducting an investigation into the safety of level crossings and that the document is in the course of preparation, but not yet available to hon. Members during consideration of the Bill?

Mr. McLoughlin: No, I was responding to a question asked by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). If the inspectorate publishes a report it will be available in due course. That was what the hon. Gentleman asked.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister confirm that last summer the Secretary of State specifically asked for the railway inspectorate to consider safety on pedestrian crossings over railways and to prepare a report? Surely he can tell us how far that report has got.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), the former Secretary of State, issued various instructions when an accident which was referred to earlier occurred. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman any information about the progress of the report.

As I said, Parliament will need to be assured that the interests of users of footpaths have been adequately covered. I note that there are four petitions against the Bill. The petitioners will have the opportunity to present their objections to the Select Committee. The Committee will be in a much better position than we are tonight to examine in detail the issues involved and it will have the added advantage of hearing expert evidence. The House will know——

Mr. Redmond: Does the Minister agree that any safety improvements should be at British Rail's expense and should not be borne by the local authorities?

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not want to get into that issue now. Local authorities may want something and British Rail may want something else. Discussions may have to take place about costing and if the authorities want something to be provided, they might have to contribute. It is abundantly clear from the debate that the Government are continually pressured to increase investment in British Rail to make it a more attractive venture for the travelling public to use. That usually means increasing the speed of trains to get from A to B.

If we are persistently asked to slow down trains, one must question the supposition that such investment should be made. I remember the arguments about the electrification of the east coast line and the tremendous pressure for that to be done. In the end, the Government decided that it met the criteria and the investment was made. Now we are being told to slow down trains or not to take account of serious accidents that have happened. The accident that occurred in the constituency of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) was horrendous and affected all hon. Members who dealt with the incident and read the report on it. It was a tragedy.

The House will know that the Government have proposed that consideration of these matters should be taken out of Parliament, as the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure recommended. We hope to be in a position very shortly to announce our conclusions about that.

I hope that the Bill will be given a Second Reading so that it can proceed to Committee for detailed consideration.

8.54 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Like many hon. Members, I was intrigued by the fact that the Bill which seeks authority to close 10 level crossings has not been incorporated in a general powers Bill, but has come

[Mr. Peter Snape]

to the House in splendid isolation, if that is not too mixed a metaphor. The Minister referred to the accident at Carr lane crossing and we were all appalled by that accident and the tragic circumstances surrounding it. That accident perhaps provided a catalyst for British Rail to act to prevent similar tragedies.

As I said in an intervention, it is by no means unusual for me to stand here or on the Back Benches to criticise British Rail, and especially its management, who all too often appear unresponsive to pressure from passengers —or customers, as they are called these days—or from hon. Members. Having read the Bill, I appreciate the fears that have been expressed, especially on behalf of organisations such as the Ramblers Association, but I have some sympathy with British Rail in this case. In my experience as a former railway signalman, farm trucks, horses, pedestrians and high-speed trains do not make an especially safe mixture. The more non-rail users can be segregated from the railway, the better for safety purposes.

There is some concern about the nature of our proceedings in this place. On other occasions, I have referred to the unsatisfactory nature of the private Bill procedure, and I hope that the authorities in this place will find a better way to deal with such matters. I understand from British Rail that the unsatisfactory nature, in its view, of the Highways Act 1980 is the main reason we are discussing this measure tonight. BR tells me that the grounds for closure or diversion of footpaths are limited to disuse or the creation of an easier route, but do not include safety. BR states in a note that any changes in existing rights of way are actively contentious and that local authorities are "frequently unwilling" to undertake them.

I shall reply to some of the points raised tonight. BR believes that seeking an order by this route—the Highways Act 1980—can take up to 10 years, even if the highway authority does not drop the matter as soon as it attracts any opposition. Therefore, any alternatives to the admittedly unsatisfactory nature of our proceedings are, to say the least, time-consuming.

The crossings that BR proposes to close, provided that the House gives the Bill a Second Reading and that the Committee—which, from what I have heard tonight will be fairly protracted—agrees to the measure, are a mixture of crossings. BR says that eight out of the 10 have little or no use. It is said that there is some use of the crossing at North Mymms in Hertfordshire. The crossing at Cantley in Doncaster to the Potteric Carr nature reserve is, in British Rail parlance, marked as "used". Presumably it is, as a bridleway, the busiest crossing of the 10 crossings proposed for closure in the Bill.

Mr. Redmond: Does my hon. Friend agree that, because there is a facility on the other side of the track, kids will invariably want to cross the line? Short of putting up a 10-foot high wall along several miles of that section, there could be no guarantee that kids would not cross the line at that point—tragically, without adult supervision. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, the railway inspectorate is in the process of preparing some guidelines on footpath and bridle-way crossings. Would not it be better to wait for that report so that we can cure not only the problem of the Potteric Carr crossing, but the problem of the other bridlepaths and footpaths throughout the country?

Mr. Snape: I do not know what will be in the report or whether it will be as detailed as my hon. Friend claims. It is pretty unlikely that the railway inspectorate or anyone else will propose the construction of a bridge or a tunnel under five railway tracks. If the railway inspectorate—or anyone else—looked at the crossing in my hon. Friend's constituency, it is unlikely—I put it no higher than that —that it would recommend the expenditure of anything from £250,000 to enable users of the bridleway to cross five tracks of main line.

I cannot, of course, prejudge the report. Until reminded of its preparation by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) a few moments ago, I was not going to make a point about it, because I had forgotten about it. I am sure that we are grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding us of it. Any such report is likely to recommend the segregation of walkers or horse-riders from the railway track, especially as railway speeds are increasing generally and as the speeds on these tracks will be as high or higher than the speeds on any other railway track in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) said that it would be necessary to build a 10-foot fence to prevent children from crossing the line. Regrettably, if one put up a 50-foot high chain metal fence along the railway line, people would find a way in which to get over or under it. A considerable proportion of British Rail's expenditure is used in repairing fences alongside railway tracks. The fences are regularly broken down, usually by adults seeking a short cut, within days or weeks of their repair or installation. I have listened with interest to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley, but I do not believe that his point about people finding ways across railway lines is very valid.

Despite—I am not talking about the crossings in the Bill—the apparent belief of the great British public that a fenced-off railway line merely presents a challenge in their quest to get from A to B in the shortest possible time, it is right that British Rail should do its best to ensure that safety remains paramount, especially in the light of the accident to which other hon. Members have referred.

It has been said that some agreement has been reached with the local authorities about nine of the 10 proposals, and that only one crossing, to which I have referred, is controversial. Agreement on it has not been reached, and British Rail told me as recently as last Friday that it has not been possible even to hold a meeting with the metropolitan borough of Doncaster. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley will use his undoubted influence with his local authority—I do not blame the authority, because I am only repeating what British Rail told me last Friday—to ensure that a meeting takes place sooner rather than later about the possible diversion of the footpath and about the closure of the crossing.

During my time as a British Rail employee, I met two or three operating staff members and two or three engine drivers—as they used to be called—who had been involved in fatal accidents, some at crossings such as this and some on lengths of plain track. For signalmen, platelayers and especially drivers, the horror of that moment never leaves them.

This tragedy involved one driver for whom the accident was even worse than it was for his colleague. It was the second such incident in which he had been involved, and he has been unable to resume his duties as a driver ever since. That pales into significance compared with the

tragedy experienced by the bereaved, but it shows the views of railwaymen and women who regularly face such problems. The sooner such pedestrian crossings are diverted and the sooner people, whether ramblers, bird watchers or courting couples—to whom the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) delicately referred; or perhaps he delicately chose not to refer to them—cease to cross the tracks in front of high-speed trains, the better.

I hope that my hon. Friend will use his best offices to bring about such a meeting.

Mr. Redmond: We cannot diminish the horror faced by the victims and their families, and by the drivers involved in fatalities on British Rail. I appreciate the drivers' views about being involved in such a horrible accident.

I was involved for many years in negotiations with management. One could always negotiate when there was a willingness for people to talk, but we used to hit a stumbling block when management sought to dictate the terms. They would ask us to agree to their proposals and sort out a solution afterwards. Experience has taught me to be a little concerned about "jam tomorrow". Had British Rail adopted a more reasonable approach, it might have received a suitable response from Doncaster council.

If British Rail is willing to find a solution, that will be in everyone's interest. Kids will cross that line even if the footpath is stopped. If we are concerned about safety, we should provide reasonable access across that line, either by a bridge or by a tunnel—which I do not think is practicable. When a new housing estate is built, many footpaths may be provided, but people will find the natural footpath—the shortest path from A to B. I shall check with the authority tomorrow, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the matter to my attention.

Mr. Snape: If a meeting takes place, proposals and alternatives can be explored. British Rail's representatives are not here officially, but they are present and will have heard that exchange. Perhaps they will react accordingly.

What about the alternatives, some of which were mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, South and for Don Valley? I am informed that every road crossing on the east coast main line is a proper barrier type crossing under the supervision of a signalman, not necessarily at the crossing but through closed-circuit television. I understand that there are 146 footpath crossings on the east coast main line, and the cost of providing such facilities at every one of them would be enormous.

Railway expenditure is scrutinised far more closely than expenditure on any other mode of transport, and the prospects are minimal of getting a system of automatic half-barriers covered by closed-circuit television past the eagle eyes of the civil servants at the Department of Transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South suggested a speed restriction. However, one of the attractions of a high-speed railway is, of course, its speed. Electrification not only saves energy but enables travelling times between our major cities to be decreased.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed suggested warning lights or an audible warning at crossings. At a speed of 125 mph and a future speed of 140 mph, it is difficult to see how warning lights without a physical barrier to prevent people crossing will be anything other than an additional hazard rather than an additional safety precaution. The crossing at Carr lane has five railway tracks, and warning lights would be flashing almost all day —in deference to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I shall not say, all night.

Most people, including those who are up at 5 o'clock in the morning bird watching, and the others to whom I referred who have other things in mind at midnight or 1 am, normally demonstrate an aversion to waiting. If lights are flashing for a long time because of the approach of a number of trains, their message could be ignored. That has happened, often with fatal results.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed artfully raised the issue of the sleepers on the east coast main line, and mentioned British Rail's broken promises. I had expected the hon. Gentleman to raise those matters on earlier British Rail Bills. It was obvious that they might be raised by other hon. Members, and I decided to carry out some research. British Rail provided me with figures about sleeper usage north of Newcastle. I do not say that the figures are right because, as we know to our cost, British Rail's figures are not always 100 per cent. accurate. However, the figures show that the peak usage time for the sleeper train north of Newcastle is Thursday evening, when it is used by hon. Members. Apparently no one else uses them for much of the working week.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed may disagree with that, but I am only repeating the figures provided to me by BR. Although my admiration for the hon. Gentleman, if not his party, remains constant, I do not believe that the provision of a mobile mattress—much as he might need it—would pass the eagle eyes of those civil servants in the Department of Transport who are responsible for passing or rejecting, and always delaying, BR's investment proposals.

It looks as though BR is saying that the hon. Gentleman is on his own in the sleeper—at least no moral aspersions can be cast against the hon. Gentleman in such circumstances. I fear that his case is yet to be made, given BR's figures.

Mr. Beith: Some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, including the hon. Members for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) will not be very happy when they read what the hon. Gentleman has said. They have been active, along with many others, in campaigning for the restoration of sleeper services. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not complaining about those hon. Members who use the train as opposed to those who claim their car allowance by driving an enormous distance home when there is a perfectly good train service available.

Most of the traffic on sleepers is towards London rather than away from it. A considerable amount of such traffic was generated from Newcastle as well as from the borders. If it is possible to run a sleeper service from Carlisle and Preston, it should be possible to do so from Tyneside.

Mr. Snape: To say that I have raised a hornet's nest is the wrong metaphor, given that there is only one hornet in it. However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument and I hope that those responsible for providing the figures will reconsider the matter. They appear to believe that more people travel between Newcastle and London rather than from further north. I appreciate that BR does not even run a sleeper service to Newcastle, but its excuse is

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that it has other services that run late at night and early in the morning, so the demand is catered for. However, I am not seeking to defend BR's spurious figures.

It is a brave Member who dares to argue with people in the Ramblers Association, which packs enormous power and influence. That association has criticised BR for its use of the parliamentary procedures to introduce its Bill—that is not an unreasonable criticism, given what we have heard. I hope that the Minister will study BR's reasons for that, and will tell the Committee whether they are valid. It has argued that the Bill is the only way in which to tackle safety matters, as the Highways Act 1980 precludes such discussion.

The 13th point in the Ramblers Association's brief to hon. Members suggests the depths of its cynicism:

"The crossings in the Bill have existed for over a century. If they are now dangerous it is because BR has made them so by increasing the speeds of trains for commercial gain."

Given the policies of the present Government, it is inevitable that commercial gain is considered whatever the supposed service. That argument is rather tendentious, given that most of us are in favour of getting from A to B as quickly as possible. It is unfair to criticise BR for that.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I suspect that that objection would come as a great surprise to most members of the Ramblers Association and to those who are on the side of the pedestrian and the rambler. Most of the pedestrians and ramblers I know want British Rail to carry more and more passengers to help to reduce the increasing number of cars on our roads.

Mr. Snape: I am sure that, as a rambler himself, the hon. Gentleman will seek to make that point to the Ramblers Association.

Point No. 14 does not have a great deal to say in favour of the Bill. The Ramblers Association refers to people being forced to walk or to ride a horse along the road, once the bridleway or pathway has been diverted. It says that, if there is no convenient grass verge, that is not most people's idea of improved safety. I venture to suggest that that is far safer, even though it may not be the most desirable or safe method, than cantering a horse across a railway line when trains are travelling between 100 and 140 mph.

Mr. Redmond *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I promised that I would give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Redmond: I think that I ought to clear up the earlier point about Doncaster borough council. Doncaster was first made aware of the proposed Bill on 6 November 1990, when British Rail submitted the Bill to Parliament. There had been no consultations or discussions between British Rail and Doncaster borough council. British Rail had never asked for discussions with the council. It seems to me, therefore, that British Rail was at fault. Doncaster is the relevant authority for the area. British Rail ought to have asked for discussions with the council so as to find a way round the possibility of similar accidents in the future. It ought to have held those discussions with the council in the summer. British Rail ought not to have waited until it was ready to deposit the Bill.

Mr. Snape: I am grateful for that clarification, but it does not alter the fact that the Bill is before us. I understand that the letter sent to Doncaster borough council was couched in exactly the same form as the letters sent to the other nine local authorities. I understand that some discussion has taken place. I understand also that there has been a measure of agreement. I keep using that caveat, because my information came from British Rail only last Friday. All of us have to seek information wherever we can obtain it. However, British Rail's point is that a letter identical to that sent to Doncaster borough council has not resulted in a meeting.

I repeat the plea that I made earlier—that bruised and ruffled feelings are one thing, but when the future safety of people using crossings is at stake, discussions ought to take place sooner rather than later. Nevertheless, I accept my hon. Friend's view that this is a well used crossing and a treasured local amenity. Unusual though the measure may be in being presented in this form, I believe that the Bill is worthy of support.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman gave me the opportunity to check that he quoted British Rail's figures correctly. I discovered that he did not. On southbound journeys by sleeper, the average for over a year amounted to 21 passengers from Tyneside and Teesside, 2·5 passengers from the borders, with the remaining berths generally being filled by passengers from Edinburgh.

Mr. Snape: That was another pretty artful intervention. I have no wish to drag out the debate. I notice that the northbound journeys were not quoted by the hon. Gentleman, perhaps—I put it no higher than this—for the reasons that I outlined. The hon. Gentleman may feel that I should not have outlined them, but it seemed to me to be too good a debating point to overlook.

We are not making debating points about the Bill. I repeat that the segregation of non-railway users from high-speed trains is a desirable objective. I hope that the House will allow the Bill to go forward. If there is a Division, I shall vote for the Bill.

9.23 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), because he is in extremely good form. I know that he has had a pretty heavy weekend, since his football team has managed to gain promotion from the fourth to the third division. There is a great deal of excitement in Stockport at the prospect. I was pleased to hear that he is in favour of increasing train speeds. He is one of the better-known supporters of Stockport County, and people are dredging up all sorts of stories in the town.

I am sure my hon. Friend will want to deny one that is circulating—that, when he was working a signal box in Cheadle Heath one Saturday afternoon he slipped all the signals to red and nipped into Stockport County ground to watch a match for some time, only to discover when shouting with great enthusiasm for his team that one of his supervisors was not far behind him in the crowd. My hon. Friend had to make a hasty return to his signal box. I do not know whether that story is true, but it is circulating at the moment in Stockport.

Mr. Snape: With regard to my hon. Friend's point about celebrations over the weekend, although I support

Stockport County and saw them gain promotion on Saturday, my constituency football team, West Bromwich Albion, was relegated from the second division to the third. As a result of that, any joy that I might have expressed publicly had to be muted.

The story that my hon. Friend recounted was broadly accurate. However, the signals were not turned to red, they were turned to green. I had switched the signal box out to go and watch the cup match.

Mr. Bennett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clearing that up. I wonder who he will be supporting next season in the third division.

My name stands against a motion that the Bill should be read a Second time in six months' time. Hon. Members often regard such motions as ridiculous, but I believe that such a delay would be appropriate for this Bill. In that time, perhaps British Rail could repair some of the damage that it has done as a result of the way in which it has introduced the Bill and I would hope that it could begin useful negotiations with the local authorities, the Ramblers Association and others involved in the issue.

Instead of wasting the time of the House on Second Reading and then taking up the time in Committee of four hon. Members, who presumably will have to visit all the sites and consider the details, and then perhaps having to take up the time of the House with amendments, the matter should be resolved with common sense and without involving parliamentary procedures.

I argue that the Bill has little to do with safety. British Rail is simply trying to shift liability for accidents from its shoulders to other people's shoulders. That is clear from the way in which British Rail has treated the House with contempt. As I understand it, following the tragic accident at Doncaster, the Secretary of State for Transport sensibly recognised that there was a substantial problem with crossings on the east coast line and elsewhere where British Rail was trying to speed up trains. The Secretary of State asked the railway inspectorate to carry out an inquiry into the problem, take evidence and discover what could be done to resolve the issue.

Although there may not have been any accidents on the east coast line in the 10 years that British Rail has speeded up trains on that line, we are all aware that on other crossings, in particular on vehicle crossings, there have been accidents. We must recognise the terrible distress caused to people who have lost members of their family in those accidents and we must also recognise the horror experienced by the train drivers involved.

As trains move at such high speeds, it is no longer possible for a driver to see someone on a crossing and take any sensible action to stop the train hitting that individual. We must also recognise that in many places it is not safe for someone to look up the track to see whether a train is coming. It is no longer possible for crossings to be manned simply by people looking and seeing. It is, therefore, odd that British Rail and the railway inspectorate have had powers for the past 10 years to suggest that safety measures should be taken including the installation of warning lights and barriers, but no such measures have been adopted on the east coast mainline or elsewhere.

It is therefore odd that British Rail should suddenly decide to rush the Bill through the House and pre-empt the railway inspectorate inquiry in such a way as to put up the backs of local authorities. All local authorities along the line first heard about proposals to close the crossings when the Bill was presented to Parliament, rather than hearing from British Rail that it had a problem and asking whether something could be done.

I am not surprised that Doncaster council has been reluctant to meet British Rail about the matter. The production of such a fait accompli with a parliamentary Bill is not the right way to start negotiations. I can understand why Doncaster and some other local authorities are upset. It is totally inappropriate for British Rail to act in that way. It should have started negotiations. Only when it could prove that negotiations had not produced the desired effect—that is, making it safer for people to cross from one side to the other, and safer for British Rail—should it have introduced the Bill.

Mr. Redmond: Having been on Doncaster council and knowing the rest of the councils, the officers who work for them and their caring attitude and concern about the tragedy that took place, I know that they are anxious to find a solution. The dictatorial attitude of British Rail in saying, "This or else," means that the council cannot win either way. The council is searching for a solution. My hon. Friend would agree that British Rail should adopt a more reasonable approach and have meaningful discussions with the council to find a solution. Kids will cross that land, and they will do so without the supervision of an adult.

My hon. Friend is perfectly correct. British Rail appears to want to shift responsibility to whoever is involved in an accident because they should not have been on that line. I agree that councils need to be consulted. Nobody wants a tragedy like that to happen again.

Mr. Bennett: I certainly accept my hon. Friend's intervention. We must look at history and remember that almost all railways were promoted through parliamentary Bills in which compromises were worked out between the requirements of people to get from one side of the railway to the other and the requirements of the railway to have a fairly safe passage. In most early railway Bills, Parliament insisted that a substantial number of underpasses for farm animals and pedestrians or footbridges and, in some cases, trackways for animals were built. It was only with some later parliamentary Bills that British Rail began to persuade Parliament that it was perfectly safe to put in level crossings, whether for pedestrians, animals or vehicles.

It is a little unfair for British Rail now to say that, because it wants to speed up trains—we all want trains to be speeded up—it should take away people's right to cross from one side to the other. Although in some instances not many people will be involved, the crossings will be important to them. They will have bought property and planned where to work on the basis of those crossings.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East says that there is controversy about only one of the 10 crossings. That is not the case. There is certainly controversy at Doncaster and there is also controversy about the crossing at North Mymms, which is on the way to London. About 20,000 booklets have been published showing that route. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) claimed that that had been subject to a closure order which had been denied. The truth is that it was subject to the closure order before the 1980 legislation, so it has not been subject to an order or an attempt to get an order over the past 10 years. The attempt to obtain a

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diversion was turned down not on the basis that it was unreasonable to provide a diversion because of safety, but on the basis that the alternative route suggested was also unreasonable and that if British Rail had been able to make a reasonable proposal for the diversion at that point, the Secretary of State might have been minded to grant that application. It seems that there is slightly more controversy than the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Snape: I understand, again from British Rail, that at the crossing to which the hon. Gentleman referred, North Mymms, it is proposed to divert the footpath 295 yd to the north and thence via Skitmans bridge, which takes Bull lane under the railway and links up with the footpath network. I do not know whether that proposal meets with any greater favour than the one to which he referred. My information from British Rail is that the basis of the negotiations with the local authority is the proposal to move the footpath 300 yd. I know nothing about the area, but a diversion of less than 300 yd to avoid crossing the railway line altogether does not seem unreasonable.

Mr. Bennett: I do not intend to go into the details, but, if that was possible, why did not British Rail implement the proposal last summer? Why did it wait to promote a Bill which inevitably will take a long time? If it could find a solution through negotiations and allow local people the right to appear at an inquiry and put objections, surely that would be a better way to proceed than to ask Members of Parliament to deal with the matter. My hon. Friend admitted that he did not know the detailed local geography. I certainly do not. I doubt whether many other hon. Members know the exact details. Probably only the hon. Member for that constituency knows the detail. I have not seen any hon. Members jumping up to make a comment on it. Surely negotiation would be the way to proceed rather than to continue with the Bill, especially as it raises the fear among ramblers that, after 10 crossings being closed this Session, another 10 will be closed next Session and another 10 will be closed in the Session following that.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): While my hon. Friend is on this point, has he considered why these 10 specific crossings have been put before us in this Bill? We have little information about why these 10, of all the various crossings, have been selected by British Rail.

Mr. Bennett: I have not been able to find an exact reason. British Rail has not said that these are the most dangerous crossings. British Rail has not said that all the crossings are on curves. I have already suggested that, with the speed at which trains travel, even on a straight piece of track it is not realistic to rely on people looking down the track and anticipating how soon the train will arrive. We must consider the provision of some effective warning by lights or other means.

British Rail has adopted an inappropriate approach to implementing the measures in the Bill. The original railway promoters negotiated along the entire length of the track and said that they had to have a certain number of crossings. Perhaps where five crossings were proposed before the railway line was built, the promoters managed to persuade local people and Parliament that they could be replaced by three. Such negotiations can take place and people can be persuaded. Everyone accepts that a walk across the railway track is not particularly safe and that it would be far better to put a tunnel underneath or a bridge over the top. But that is expensive, so instead of putting in one for one, British Rail proposes to put in one bridge or tunnel for two previous crossings.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend accept that, when the orginal Acts went through Parliament, landowners often insisted that a bridge should be provided where lines crossed sections of land? By a quirk, in the 19th century the land was perhaps owned by several landowners and no bridge was provided but now people need to cross a railway from side A to side B. In those circumstances and to recognise the change in the pattern of people's behaviour, should not the Government ensure that British Rail has an adequate grant to provide facilities such as bridges to take into account factors that, if they had existed when the orginal legislation went through, would have been provided for by the orginial promoters?

Mr. Bennett: I accept that argument. In agreeing that it may not be possible to replace every crossing with a safer one, I firmly argue that someone must come up with money for safety. It is not appropriate for the money to come from British Rail's capital grant. That problem must be addressed, just as the rights of people to follow traditional routes must be addressed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) pointed out, if safe crossings are not provided, young children in particular will cross anywhere and in great danger. We must consider the problem, but the Bill is wholly inappropriate.

I was disappointed that the Minister did not tell us what happened to the inquiry or that the Government were investigating the whole question of crossings. Instead, he said that the Government were agnostic about the Bill. The problem will not go away. We need a solution that will be satisfactory to walkers and those who travel on trains.

Mr. Redmond: At Mexborough there was a crossing from one side of the station to the other. The old railway sleepers provided a crossing for prams and wheelchairs. Because of some improvements and the 125s from Manchester coming at a greater pace round a curve, British Rail tore up the track without consulting anybody. There is a footpath across the railway lines, but, regrettably, British Rail's solution for disabled people who must get to the other side of the station is for them to travel to Doncaster, change platforms, come back on the return train, and to hell with the inconvenience caused. That is British Rail's attitude.

When we asked British Rail to provide an alternative to the footbridge for mothers and disabled people, the answer was that, provided that South Yorkshire passenger transport authority coughed up the money, it would install an alternative. South Yorkshire PTA is strapped for cash. The local authority is strapped for cash. It is British Rail's property, but it is refusing to fund such a facility for disabled people. That is the attitude which prevails. British Rail does not care what happens, so long as it does not have the responsibility.

Mr. Bennett: I fully accept that.

Will the hon. Member for Keighley or, if he does not get a chance to reply because so many others want to speak,

British Rail state clearly whether this proposal to close 10 crossings is the thin end of the wedge and the intention is to introduce further Bills to close more, or whether 10 is the final number? Will it be explained why British Rail succeeded in closing a path at Taunton Deane on safety grounds, yet the Minister has claimed that it is not possible to use those procedures for the crossings in this legislation? Will the Minister explain why British Rail regularly manages to close footbridges temporarily, on safety grounds when they get into disrepair? As I understand it, British Rail has plenty of powers to deal with such issues, at least temporarily on safety grounds. Such issues must be put to local inquiries; that is a far better way to proceed.

We need a comprehensive approach to the problem. We should not approve the Bill. It would be a great breach of parliamentary procedure to give a Bill a Second Reading, which would inflict on other hon. Members the duty to scrutinise it in detail. British Rail could approach the problem perfectly satisfactorily under existing legislation, and I hope that the House will reject the Bill.

9.43 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I entirely share the anxiety of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

When private Bills are introduced, we get a single sheet of paper with half a dozen paragraphs of information. I have complained before that that is a contempt of the House. Promoters may be used to doing the minimum amount of work for the maximum amount of money. For example, I understand from a reliable source that those promoters can charge local authorities—and, no doubt, British Rail—£500 an hour for a consultation. The House recently laid down a scale of charges for legislation that ran into several thousand pounds, so it is not cheap. One of the cheapest contributions to Parliament could be more information than we have been given in the seven paragraphs on one side of a single sheet of paper.

The House is also entitled to better information than we have received from the Minister. He was obviously not aware of an investigation by his Department into standards of care on level crossings. He should have come to the House prepared. Although the Department of Transport has an enormous number of civil servants—I realise that only a tiny proportion is devoted to the railways—none of them is in the Box today to provide the Minister with information. When we have asked him for information, he has simply discarded our wish in an act of callous contempt.

The Bill seeks to provide an outside body with additional powers and we are supposed to approve it without the requisite information. If we seek to obtain that information, we are told that it is not available. That is not good enough; nor is it good enough to say that a Select Committee will look into the matter, because we know how Select Committees work. They are lovely for the lawyers; they charge an astronomical sum, which causes Tory Members hardly to raise an eyebrow. In the same breath Tory Members speak about urging those who do useful jobs to curtail wage claims and about lawyers who charge hundreds of pounds a day. The lawyers speak slowly so that the days stretch out into long refreshers. No wonder they feel refreshed when they spend so many days going through the measures. I have never sat on a Committee considering a private Bill. That is not an invitation to put me on one—I do not want to be on one, as my duties on other Select Committees take a great deal of time.

Because the Chamber is important—all 650 Members have access to it—information should be provided there and not hived off. It does not matter what the procedure is; we cannot take part in Select or Standing Committees to obtain information but should be informed here.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend said that we received one page of scant information on the Bill. That seems to be the trend. The Government give us little detail on which to base our judgment because too much knowledge could be dangerous. Regretfully, there appears to be a nasty practice of ensuring that Bills reach their Committee stage where the Government have the right to nominate a chairman. Committees can therefore be loaded by a Government who seek to push Bills through. My hon. Friend is correct about the lack of information, but will he comment on the way in which Chairmen are appointed to Committees?

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right and simply provides some details to endorse what I said.

The Chamber is the most important place in Parliament. We hoped that it would be invigorated with the advent of the television cameras and, by and large, it has been. But whether it is invigorated by good attendance on some occasions and sparse ones on others such as this, information should be available to Members.

Mr. Chris Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree with everything that he said about the inadequacy of the information that tends to come from the Government on such occasions.

Paragraph 4 of the seven short paragraphs that constitute the promoter's statement, which should contain the fundamental point behind why British Rail is introducing the Bill, states that it

"represents the first stage of a more comprehensive review of the position on high speed lines."

It says nothing about the nature of the review or of the parameters within which the review was conducted. It also says nothing about the safety considerations that formed part of the review. It simply tells us that a review has taken place. Surely it is ridiculous that we are asked to make decisions about a Bill based on a review about which we are told absolutely nothing.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right. The statement could usefully and relevantly have said that the review was being conducted in conjunction with the railway inspectorate's examination into safety at level crossings.

Having got that point of information out of the way, I should say that, although I do not have a financial interest, in railway debates I always like to decare that I have five £10 shares in Keighley and Worth valley light railway, which has two level crossings. I have never received a dividend and I never expect to, but my contact gives me a background in the operation of railways, albeit ones on which the trains run more slowly than those under consideration tonight.

On the Worth valley railway, as on every other, safety is of the utmost priority. Those of us who are considering the Bill critically are not critical of safety: we are arguing that safety standards should be maintained at all times.

[Mr. Cryer]

The limited and sparse information that we have includes a letter circulated by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), which states:

"There is a real need to minimise the risk of another tragic accident such as that which occurred at Carr Lane, Doncaster, last year, when a woman and two children were killed".

He is right, but one wonders why, almost 12 months after the accident occurred, British Rail has done nothing. If the matter is so pressing that it requires the resources of Parliament, why has not British Rail undertaken safety measures such as linking approaching trains with some sort of light or bell-warning device on that crossing? That is a legitimate question.

Mr. Waller: I do not know whether, like me, the hon. Gentleman has visited Carr lane crossing. If he has, he will have seen the safety measures that have been adopted, the signs that have been erected and the way in which the approach to the crossing has been altered to try to do the best for people crossing the line. I do not have time to go into detail, but there are great defects with lights, and it is possible that, if lights were installed as the hon. Gentleman suggests, we would kill more people than we save.

Mr. Cryer: I know that signs are displayed there. I followed the case carefully because it was such an horrific and tragic accident. I was thinking of something more positive, such as the operation of barriers or the construction of a bridge. It might be said that those are costly measures—the bridge might cost £250,000——

Mr. Waller: A lot more.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Member for Keighley says, from a sedentary position, "A lot more." What is life about? If people want to go to an important nature reserve, why should not the Government invest that sort of money? The hon. Member for Keighley does not raise an eyebrow when the Secretary of State for Defence says that we are to spend £7,000 million on a European fighter aircraft or when we put Tornados, at £21 million apiece, out of use because there are too many of them. Why do we have two standards—one for defence expenditure and one for facilities that help and widen people's experience by allowing them to go to a nature reserve near an urban district? That will be made more difficult.

The cost would be £250,000—perhaps a bit more—but that would not apply to every crossing. This crossing has become the focus of attention because it was the site of a tragic accident. Let us find the money somewhere. If the Government want to do something, they find the money. It is important that we get these things in perspective. Why do the Government always act in such a penny-pinching way in respect of projects designed to broaden experience or to maintain and develop life?

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) knows, the civil service pours out money for bypass roads. I am thinking, for instance, of the provision that is made for the heavy vehicles that take traffic from the railways. There seems to be no limit to the amount of money that the Department of Transport is prepared to spend on such schemes. Of course, some of them are intended to increase safety, but others are for fairly lavish purposes that many of us question. The number of civil servants devoted to railway matters is about 70, whereas the number devoted to roads is about 2,000.

In terms of annual Government expenditure, the amount involved here would be very tiny. The Government should look more closely at the circumstances. For one thing, such expenditure would help to create jobs. I realise that that would be a very unusual attitude for a Government who, over the past 10 or 11 years, have destroyed jobs. However, why should they not turn over a new leaf and decide to provide some jobs in the civil engineering industry, which is very much in the doldrums, and help people in Doncaster at the same time?

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Bill seeks to make access to Potteric Carr a damn sight more difficult and more dangerous. I question some of the figures given by those talking about the cost of a solution. No doubt any number of redundant miners would be quite willing to provide a solution costing a damn sight less than the amount that we have been given.

Mr. Cryer: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government cannot find £250,000 in this case, yet they were able to spend £6,000 million to attack the miners in 1984. That is why thousands of miners are redundant. The Government found £10,000 million to pay off the debts accumulated by the public utilities—the family silver—that were sold off. Consider also the amount that was spent on the employment of City gents in various merchant banks and financial advice institutions to promote privatisation. It is mind-boggling that the Government cannot find a few thousand quid to provide a bridge that would give ordinary working people the advantage of being able to cross a bridge to Potteric Carr nature reserve. It is absolutely outrageous.

Mr. Waller *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 64, Noes 38.

Division No. 141] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Arnold, Sir Thomas
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hasselhurst, Alan
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, John
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Snape, Peter
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*

Thompson, D. (Calder Valley)
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Walker, Bill (T'side North)
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gary Waller and
Mr. Peter Bottomley.

NOES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry (Derbyshire NE)
Beith, A. J.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bruce, Malcolm (Gordon)
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies (Fife NE)
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David (S Shields)
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Foster, Derek
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John (Coventry NE)
Jones, Ieuan (Ynys Môn)
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen (Barnsley West)
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Mitchell, Austin (G't Grimsby)
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray (Ogmore)
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. (Isl'ton & F'bury)
Spearing, Nigel
Thompson, Jack (Wansbeck)
Wallace, James
Wells, Bowen
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Martin Redmond and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Upon the report of the Division, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed in Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for closure or for proposal of Question).*

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned. Debate to be resumed on Thursday.

Coal Industry (Restructuring)

Postponed proceedings resumed on the Question,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

10.9 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): The motion shows yet again the continuing support given to the coal industry by our Government. Since 1979, more than £7 billion of new investment has been committed. The significance of that was grasped by the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and, by their example, productivity has increased by more than 100 per cent. Providing grant aid to British Coal of about £17 billion has enabled it to undertake major restructuring of the industry with remarkable success. There has not been a single compulsory redundancy. Men who wish to stay in the industry have always been offered alternative employment.

The size of the coal industry will be determined by the size of its market and not by Government decisions. However, the decision last year to write off British Coal's debts of £6 billion, which was equivalent to a reduction in the price of coal of £9 a tonne, has transformed its financial structure. With its new financial base, the industry has the technology, the investment and the skills to continue to improve its competitiveness and its profitability.

The coal industry is an extractive industry and collieries will naturally become exhausted. That accounts for 2 million tonnes of capacity every year. At the same time, British Coal will have to determine the overall production level to meet its customers' requirements. The order provides £300 million in respect of likely redundancies in 1991-92.

Has my hon. Friend the Minister considered the long-term consequences to the coal industry if the Labour party policy document "Opencast Coal Mining—Too High a Price?" were ever implemented? The money provided tonight would cover only a fraction of the compulsory job losses. The implication of Labour's vindictive policy, at the behest of the National Union of Mineworkers, would be catastrophic for the Nottinghamshire miners. Thousands of jobs would be lost.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): How many jobs will be lost in opencast coal mining if the document is implemented?

Mr. Stewart: The document is there for everyone to read.

Mr. Barron: How many jobs?

Mr. Stewart: I did not hear the question.

Mr. Barron: I asked the hon. Gentleman whether he could tell me how many jobs will be lost in opencast coal mining when the policy document is implemented.

Mr. Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman waits, he will hear how many jobs will be lost in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Barron: In opencast coal mining.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman should listen, and he will then get the answer. Thousands of jobs would be lost. The reason is that 13 of the 16 Nottinghamshire collieries require low-chlorine coal from the opencast sites to sweeten their product, on a ratio of six tonnes deep-mined

[Mr. Stewart]

to one tonne opencast, before it is accepted by the power generating companies. The loss of low chlorine coal by itself would be disastrous, but the loss of the £200 million annual profit from the British Coal opencast division, which is used to subsidise deep-mined coal, would increase prices by almost £5 a tonne, leaving British Coal with no market and no jobs for its miners.

The Labour party has dropped that bombshell at a time when Nottinghamshire miners are continually breaking production records. It shows the Labour party's lack of faith in and support for the coal industry, and it shows why Nottinghamshire miners abandoned socialism in 1985.

The generous restructuring grants and redundancy payments provided by the Government for the coal industry and miners wishing to leave it shows our continuing commitment. I support the order.

10.14 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I agree with one thing that the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) said. Almost in passing, he referred to the tremendous achievements of the mining industry; its increase in productivity in recent years has been unmatched in almost any other part of British industry and commerce. Despite that splendid achievement—which this country will appreciate more in a few years' time than it does now—morale has declined and the destruction of jobs has accelerated. The hon. Member who now represents Sherwood boasts about the Government's commitment to opencast mining when there has been an unparelleled reduction in the number of jobs in deep-mined coal. He should be ashamed of himself.

I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, for various reasons, his constituency may have returned him at the last general election, but his speech tonight expressing a commitment to opencast mining will not only damage the prospects of Conservative Members representing coal-mining areas in Nottinghamshire, but will have sweeping implications for Conservative votes in every coalfield in Britain.

Mr. Barron: Would my hon. Friend care to ask the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) why, before the publication of the Labour party's policy document on opencast coal, Blidworth mine in his constituency closed although it had millions of tonnes of coal? The hon. Gentleman never uttered a word in the House about that.

Mr. Hardy: I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, but we are accustomed to hearing him speak frequently in mining debates. Some of us do not read our speeches, and it is possible that no one had given the hon. Gentleman a speech to inflict on us as he carefully read it. It is not my habit to read speeches in the House, and I do not need to read a speech on the mining industry. Over the past few years, we have lived with the destruction of our local economy.

The Minister has been to my constituency. I attended a church service yesterday. We received a banner, and saw an exhibition about a local colliery that has closed. If the Minister had been to a hillside a few years ago, he would have seen head stock after head stock. Not one of those pits can be seen from that point now, because they are no longer there and the jobs that the men need do not exist either.

The hon. Gentleman said that there had been no redundancies and that jobs had been offered to miners who had been declared redundant when their pits closed. The hon. Gentleman should know that men who, over the years, have developed skills in electrical and mechanical engineering, safety and technology—he has been down a colliery, and should recognise what the work involves—were told that they would not be made compulsorily unemployed and would be given alternative jobs. They were also told that they could have no assurance that they would have the skilled jobs for which they had trained, and which they might have practised for many years. Many men skilled in the various trades that allow collieries to be maintained did not want to do unskilled work, but British Coal offered them no promise of opportunities for skilled work.

I will give way to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr Stewart).

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) accused me—

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is intervening on my speech.

Mr. Stewart: Yes, but I wanted to make the point to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) so that the hon. Member for Rother Valley would get the message. The hon. Member for Rother Valley accuses me of not raising the subject of the closure of Blidworth colliery. That is completely untrue. I raised it in the House at the time; if he reads *Hansard*, he will see that.

Mr. Hardy: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us when and in what context he offered a protest. Some of us protest vigorously about colliery closures and although the hon. Gentleman attends debates on coal, he frequently does so in order to make minor party political points rather than joining in the debate with the passion that the argument should receive.

This is another distressing debate because it is about provision for the industry to contract, to provide compensatory arrangements for redundant miners. We have heard about British Coal Enterprise Ltd. and the arrangements for redundancies. As the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) reminded us, over the past few years the industry has demonstrated what can be achieved. However, world coal prices are dangerously low and do not permit investment to enable international production to be sustained. Because of that, we are likely to develop an utterly unwise dependence on imports.

The Minister may not be prepared to listen to the Opposition, but he must be prepared to listen to those of his political persuasion. The people of whom I speak are more likely to be of his political persuasion than ours. They are employed in British Coal and are eager to see it privatised, perhaps for personal profit. However, they recognise that the world coal trade is such that Britain should not allow itself to become completely dependent upon it. Contraction will continue because more collieries are to close in 1991, and that means that dependence on imported coal is bound to increase unless the Government urgently reconsider their policy.

The Government could argue that this measure and others that they have introduced over recent years show that they have taken a positive interest. However, in Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and other areas, large sums have been invested in collieries which closed shortly afterwards. Vast reserves of coal have been locked away, perhaps for ever, and in many cases it has happened after substantial public investment. That is the approach of madness, and it is why some of us become rather concerned in coal debates.

We must plan with intelligence and recognise that in addition to provision for the closure of exhausted collieries, where redundancy may be unavoidable, we should ensure that Britain's coal capacity can be maintained to avoid reaching the position outlined today or yesterday by Mr. Edwards of British Coal which could result in a balance of payments deficit of more than £8,000 million. The Government have destroyed huge swathes of British industry. Our capacity to export manufactured goods is very much smaller than it should be, and it will be extremely difficult to make up the current balance of payments deficit. To add to that millions of pounds worth of imported coal is ridiculous.

I urge the Minister and his Treasury colleagues to pay more attention not only to a long-term economic appraisal of the international coal trade and Britain's position, but to the position that is likely to develop in the next three or four years and which may already have started to develop.

The Government frequently claim that they support and are interested in research on the clean combustion of coal. Ministers often go prancing round the country; they get up in the morning and are taken out of harm's way from the Department of Energy. One Minister recently visited Grimethorpe and expressed great interest in the work there. However, we may soon approach the point, if we have not already done so, where there is no need for resources for basic research, but a need for more resources for the development stage that should proceed.

The combined cycle technology could have enormous implications for the clean burning of coal and the long-term future of British industry. It would be useful if the Minister could assure the House and the coal industry that such research will be backed adequately and that there will be no stinting on resources. He should assure us that there will be no examples of hypocrisy when Ministers congratulate those involved in the research and then do not provide the funds that such development needs.

The Government are obviously obsessed with the right-wing dogma they serve. Although they may be eager to secure the privatisation of coal, they should not privatise it simply to allow a few profitable pits to create profit for a relatively small number of people. That would ensure that the pits that could not guarantee to provide a particularly odious level of profit would have no future.

The Government should be prepared to show some interest in and give some attention to the British mining engineering industry. If that industry takes advantage of the increasing opportunities that will be created as man scratches a little more deeply below the surface for the mineral resources that we need to develop, it will have an increasingly important international role. That industry's role will not be as important as it should be if the home base—the number of collieries in Britain—is diminished.

People in the mining industry the length and breadth of Britain now estimate that the number of collieries remaining by the end of the decade will be counted on the fingers of two hands, if not one. That is a dangerous situation, not least for hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Sherwood.

I have one colliery left in my consituency; there were 12 when I entered the House. Jobs in the area have gone and the plight of the area has been created by the hasty greed of the present Administration. Enormous problems have been created, but the problems will get even greater in other areas if the Government do not act with more wisdom than they have shown so far.

It is all very well to seek approval for tonight's order, which is designed to assist the coal mining areas to weather the ravaging storms that have assailed them in recent years. Such orders, however, are not enough. If the Government rely on such orders and refrain from using a bit of vision and common sense they will attract even more unpopularity than they deserve to have given the comments of the hon. Member for Sherwood.

10.28 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I apologise for missing the two opening speeches of the debate, but as it is a Monday I did not get down from Scotland in time. I did not expect the debate to start quite so early and I am glad to have the opportunity to make a contribution now.

I want to know why we are increasing the funding to British Coal for restructuring, given the questions that must be posed relating to British Coal's record. What will it use the money for? I shall cite two specific examples to illustrate my point. I am concerned that, given additional funds, British Coal will use them to accelerate closures and to vandalise pits that, if not operated, could be maintained on a care and maintenance basis.

I am greatly puzzled about why coal is treated differently from other reserves such as oil and gas. The Minister is familiar with the oil and gas licensing system. He knows that the state owns oil and gas and licenses the oil companies to extract it. All our coal reserves, however, are owned by British Coal, which is not required to produce an annual report on possible or probable recoverable reserves, such as those in the Department of Energy's Brown Book on oil and gas reserves. Consequently, British Coal can happily and glibly abandon pits that contain substantial coal reserves, without any record having been made of what has been lost for exploitation in the immediate future or by future generations. Given that the abandonment of a pit is usually irreversible, that seems to me to be irresponsible. It is extraordinary that to date the Government have taken no steps to put that right.

During the last five or six years a substantial number of pits have been closed and abandoned. I have taken a particular interest in the matter since I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill that became the Coal Industry Act 1987. It was drawn to my attention that pits were being closed, even though alternative operators had applied to British Coal for licences to take over those pits. Their applications were refused outright. There was no discussion. British Coal was not interested. The Government were not prepared to intervene in the management of British Coal.

I refer specifically to Betteshanger pit in Kent, the first one drawn to my attention. A miners' consortium was put together and applied to British Coal for a licence to take

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

over the pit. British Coal turned down the application, vandalised the pit, removed the machinery and flooded it irretrievably. That pit was lost for ever.

At about the same time, British Coal mothballed the Monktonhall colliery in Midlothian. The Minister will no doubt know that that pit has substantial reserves of low sulphur coal—admittedly in a narrow seam. Nevertheless, it is a pit which British Coal says that it is willing at least to keep mothballed until it concludes its review next month. The miners' consortium there has had a little more time than the Kent consortium had; it had precisely six weeks from the moment that British Coal announced closure to the point at which it abandoned and flooded the pit. British Coal gave the Monktonhall miners three years' notice. The consortium that has been formed has therefore used that time to promote its case energetically and with a great deal of enterprise.

The consortium has tried to identify how much support there is within the local community for reopening the pit. There are many skilled miners in the area who were made redundant as a result of the closure. Many of those miners —I have met a number of them—are working on buses or as security guards, and so on. They are anxious, interestingly enough, to get back to their pit. They believe that they can make it pay. Regrettably, however, every attempt to have their case supported at political level has been frustrated. The charge falls mostly on the Government. Their attitude has been, "The licensing of coal mines is entirely a matter for British Coal. We are not prepared to intervene in the management of British Coal."

If we had a written constitution or proper accountability, no Government would be allowed to get away with that statement. They are the custodians of our coal reserves. They should be accountable to this House. However, the Government refuse categorically to be accountable to the House. The consortium told me that it made numerous requests for meetings with Ministers or civil servants, that it has had replies from 18 different civil servants in the Department of Energy, but that on no occasion has any official or Minister been prepared to meet it, under any circumstances. Members of the consortium held a press conference in the House last week which was attended by five hon. Members. It was apparent that their frustration was reaching its limit. They were extremely angry about the way they were being treated.

Conservative Members should be aware that that consortium comprises skilled miners who have said that they are willing to acquire shares in a company owned by the consortium to take over the running of their old pit. They are willing to put up £2,000 each of share capital and they have been offered finance by private institutions. They are not looking for one ha'penny of public money or public funds to take over the pit. They simply want the right to secure the licence and operate the pit and so demonstrate whether they can succeed where British Coal has failed.

Some people have been sceptical, but, as the consortium has pointed out, there has been no constructive response to the proposals. The consortium has simply been greeted by a blank wall. That is a disgrace.

It is important that we hear the Minister's response to my points. However, there is also considerable frustration and disappointment in the community about the treatment that the consortium has received from the local Labour party. The Labour party has not been supportive, because it insists that, if the pit is to reopen, it should be reopened by British Coal. That is a betrayal of the interests of working people in the area who are prepared to put money where their mouth is and who have skill and commitment, but who have received no support from the Labour party.

The community concerned has no quarrel with the National Union of Mineworkers. The workers have all said that they are willing to be NUM members and that would substantially increase NUM membership in Scotland which has been devastated. The Labour party and the NUM seem determined to ensure that British Coal continues to run the pit, in spite of its record of destroying pits and failing to make the pit in question profitable.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is making a point about people letting those workers down. The Scottish NUM is against the proposal and the hon. Gentleman says that the Labour party is against it as well. The hon. Member for Gordon was a member of the Standing Committee that examined last year's Coal Industry Bill which restricted the number of people who could work in a coal mine to 150 and there have been numerous parliamentary questions about that since. Does the hon. Gentleman know of any mine run by British Coal at the moment which has long wall faces underground at the depth of the face at Monktonhall that could sustain a work force of 150 at that face? If he cannot name such a pit, are not he and others misleading the miners because, under current legislation, they could not run that mine anyway, never mind all this waffle about investment?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) should meet the miners concerned and hear what they have to say. They are prepared to put their money where their mouth is. They believe that they can do it. They know the pit and all they want is for the Labour party not to oppose what they are trying to do or to frustrate them in their attempt to secure the licence for their own mine. They are not asking the Labour party to back them and they are not asking for public money. They simply want to know why they are being opposed and frustrated and why only a particular option is to be considered. Those miners have no confidence in British Coal ever making the pit a success if it reopens it—and that is doubtful.

A review is to take place in June, although British Coal has not said exactly when. The assurance I seek from the Minister is that if British Coal, in reviewing the pit by the end of June, has not made a clear statement that it intends to reopen the pit by an agreed and realistic date and begins to take back the miners involved in the consortium and others, the Government will intervene to allow alternative licences to be operated and will recognise the consortium's commitment and its right to have an opportunity to take over the licence. That is the minimum that it is entitled to expect from the House. The refusal to date even to offer members of the consortium a meeting is a disgrace. I assure both parties that there are people in the county of Midlothian who are extremely angry at the way they have been treated after more than two years of determined commitment.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley rightly referred to the Coal Industry Act 1990. He will remember that I tabled an amendment to the Bill, suggesting one of two options

—first, that the ownership of coal reserves should be transferred to the Department of Energy and that the Department should allocate licences, as with oil and gas; secondly, as a moderate fallback position, that when British Coal refuses to offer a licence there should be a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. Therefore, people could not be treated with the stonewall of silence and non co-operation. One would have thought that, of all people, Tories would like to encourage such enterprise from people in their own communities who know their own industry.

I have been so concerned with this matter that I have tried to explore what pressures might be brought to bear. I took up the matter initially with the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Gordon Borrie, indicating that British Coal was abusing its monopoly position. Quite reasonably, he replied to me saying:

"I have to say that although I recognise your concern at the possibility of British Coal's deciding to close Monktonhall colliery without giving the others the opportunity to operate it, I am not able to intervene in that matter under the United Kingdom competition legislation. This is because the treaty of Paris gives the European Commission the exclusive jurisdiction to investigate the possibility of a producer of coal abusing its market power or behaving anti-competitively."

I have done what Sir Gordon Borrie suggested and I have passed the entire correspondence to Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner responsible for competition in the European Community, and suggested that he should investigate the matter. My suspicion is that the reason why the Government have not been prepared to intervene is that they have made it clear that they wish to privatise British Coal. As with other privatisations, they want to privatise a monopoly—a single entity—and the last thing they want to see is the emergence of a possibly successfully managed pit under different ownership that will in some way depress the flotation price of British Coal.

I challenge the Government to demonstrate whether they have any real commitment to enterprise when it is demonstrated in a local community, and allow them a chance—that is all they are asking—to prove themselves.

On many occasions during the coal strike Conservative Members asked, "Why don't you give the miners the chance to run their own pits?" Now that miners are asking for a chance, what do they get from the Government? They get complete and absolute silence and a refusal to address the issue. That suggests a double standard.

I have also contacted the Select Committee on Energy on this matter. I heard an indication of interest from the Chairman of the Committee, who thinks that pits should be offered to miners. Other members of the Committee have also indicated that they will want to know from British Coal—indeed, the Committee has written to British Coal—the outcome of the review. I have no doubt that if the outcome of the review is that it intends to close the pit without offering any other operators the chance to take it over, the Committee will wish to investigate British Coal's motives.

I noticed the Minister exchanging sly glances with the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). This is a very interesting test case. The hon. Member for Rother Valley is entitled to say that he does not believe that that consortium can operate profitably. I wholly accept that the hon. Member for Rother Valley has long experience of mining. I do not dispute that. However, counter to that is the fact that if a consortium of miners who have worked a pit, know a pit, have their own mining consultant, and financial backing which requires no investment of public money, wish to take over that pit which British Coal has not succeeded in mining profitably and apparently has no interest in continuing to operate, surely even the hon. Member for Rother Valley could conclude that they should be given a chance to prove whether they are right. It is only their money and their backers' money that has been put at risk.

Mr. Andy Stewart: When the Blidworth colliery in my constituency closed, we did exactly what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Miners and another operator wished to reopen the mine and were refused by British Coal to operate under a scheme which would have been viable. I can understand the hon. Gentleman's expression of anger.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know that other hon. Members have been involved in similar schemes. We still have not had any satisfactory response from government sources. I repeat that the Government's performance has been disgraceful.

The chairman of the consortium, Jackie Aitchison, said to me, "If we had come to Government as Japanese offering the possibility of creating 500 jobs in a depressed part of Scotland and required no public investment, would we have been treated in this way for showing indigenous enterprise in our own community, or would we have been treated differently?" We know the answer; the Government's behaviour stinks.

10.45 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I wish to make a speech in this debate and I have saved it until the end. The Government have a nerve to talk about restructuring the coal mining industry and providing money to do it after they have destroyed the industry. I went into the industry in 1944. We had an industry then, but we have a tiny industry now. This Government have destroyed it.

It is all right for the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) to try to protect his back by telling the House what he did about Blidworth. When we had the debates about pit closures, he went into the Aye Lobby for the closures. He did not tell the people at Blidworth about that. I will tell the hon. Gentleman something else. I spoke to the gentleman who chaired the public meetings supported by the Bishop of Southwell to stop the closure. What did Bernard Savage, the chairman of the group in the village of Blidworth, tell me? The hon. Member for Sherwood did not lift a finger to help stop the closure of the Blidworth pit. But that was only one pit closure.

Then the hon. Member for Sherwood tried to cover his back by making it look as though he was fighting for the industry. He shouted his mouth off to the *Nottingham Evening Post* about Labour Members not being in the Chamber to vote against the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. That was how he tried to cover his back.

Mr. Barron: Where were all that lot?

Mr. Haynes: Indeed, where were all that lot? I will tell the House where the Minister was. He was the Minister for Sport. What does he know about mining?

Mr. Barron: He went down a pit.

Mr. Haynes: When?

Mr. Barron: Once.

Mr. Haynes: When did he go down a pit? If we had a crack in the floor, he would fall into it and we would lose him. I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister in a pit. All that he was bothered about was boxing, football, rugby, rowing. He got a Cambridge blue. *[Interruption.]* He should watch out from time to time for my left hook. What does the Minister really know?

Mr. Moynihan: It was at Oxford.

Mr. Haynes: It is no good the Minister talking to me from his seat. He should get up at the Dispatch Box. I will give way to him if he wants to have a go. We have already had a go today. I told him straightforwardly that I was going to belt him tonight. He does not know anything about the mining industry. They have put him up to handle this one tonight. We know what has happened in the industry and the way in which the Government have destroyed it, and how the hon. Member for Sherwood has helped them to destroy it. We fought against pit closures on the Opposition Benches along with the Liberals.

The Liberals were opposed to pit closures, I give them that. I remember the speeches that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made on behalf of the coal mining industry in the debates on the Coal Industry Bill. We did not always agree with what he said, but the principle that he supported was the interest of the mining industry. Yet Conservative Members were in favour of closure after closure.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose*——

Mr. Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell). He is only a young lad yet. He does not know a deal about mining either, but I shall be interested to know what the intervention is about.

Mr. Mitchell: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It is most kind of him. May I take him back to the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and ask him to explain something which has been bothering me——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): No, no, no. One industry at a time.

Mr. Haynes: I will not follow the hon. Gentleman down that path.

Mr. Andy Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is scared.

Mr. Haynes: I am not scared. It is the hon. Gentleman who is scared. He has been scared by the recent district election results and he knows what will happen in Sherwood. We shall have a Labour Member elected there to represent the miners and he will sit on the Government side of the House after the general election, when the Prime Minister dares call it. We will have that ballot and there is no doubt that the miners in Sherwood will express their view of the hon. Gentleman and his representation of them. I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He has not fought for the miners—not like we have. We have fought from day one to save that industry, but the Government are talking about restructuring and finding the money.

Not long ago, the hon. Gentleman said that he supported opencast mining. He wants to have a word about it with the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), who is never here when we have a coal mining debate. Yet he fills the local papers with what he will do about the Government's policy on opencast mining.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is my hon. Friend aware that 50 per cent. of the opencast coal that we produce comes from my county? The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is suggesting that, to save pits and miners' jobs in Nottingham, we must despoil the county of Northumberland. Is that how people should be treated?

Mr. Haynes: I am grateful for that comment, but opencast mining will destroy part of my constituency and part of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who usually sits here. I remember our debate on opencast mining on the Coal Industry Bill and how this Government agreed to its extension. It will destroy the beauty of the place and beautiful lovers' walks. All that, destroyed for the sake of opencast mining.

The hon. Member for Sherwood has a beautiful constituency. It is correctly named Sherwood. It is beautiful, but he is agreeing to its destruction. The miners back there will remember the comments that have been made here today. Make no mistake about it, we will continue to remind them of what he said about opencast mining.

RECHAR involves money from the European Economic Community to help communities in areas where these Tories have agreed to pit closures. Mr. Millan is right to stop that money. He is holding it back because the

Government are interfering. They want to spend the money on what they want. The important point is that EC Commissioner Millan says that that money should go to help communities cope with pit closures. This Government are on the fiddle again. They are always fiddling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they are trying to fiddle this RECHAR money away from where it should go. That is why we are saying what we are today. Bruce Millan is right to hold it up while this lot is on the Treasury Bench. I hope that the young Minister will let the Treasury know in no uncertain terms what we feel about this. That money should not be touched. It should be allowed to go to the mining communities for the purpose it was meant for.

I shall finish on this point—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I will go on a bit longer, then. Now hon. Gentleman have upset you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You do not want me to go on too long, but they have encouraged me to do so. Yet I will live up to the Chair. I always respect the Chair. It is not often that you have to call me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not follow the road on which the hon. Member for Gedling tried to take me.

Conservative Members must realise—Labour Members realise it only too well—that when a pit is closed all the workers' facilities also disappear. They have been provided for the community and village after village in Nottinghamshire, especially in my constituency and in Derbyshire, has lost the welfare facilities that were provided for the community. Once the pits go, no contributions are made towards the welfare facilities.

In my constituency, the local football club, Sutton Town, which has been going since 1895, goes to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) to play the team at the pit where he used to work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is in my constituency.

Mr. Haynes: It might be in your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I do not blinkin' know. All I know is that the team of my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley comes to my constituency to play my local team.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Haynes: You are out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You dragged me into this position. I did not intend to mention you. You should be independent and should not enter the argument. You brought yourself in and are now making me look a twerp.

Sutton Town football club, of which I happen to be the president, went to play the team at the welfare ground of the pit where my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley used to work. We drew 4-4. Because that pit is still working, the welfare facilities are maintained, but further down the road, where the pit has been closed, the welfare facilities have gone.

If the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), is listening, he will realise the great loss to those mining villages when their pits are closed. I know that he understands sport, because he was involved in it at university and, a few years after he entered Parliament, that lady at No. 10 appointed him as Minister for Sport. He and I are so interested in sport that, one night, we shaped up between the doors of the Chamber. He was about to throw a left hook when Madam Deputy Speaker walked through the door and he did not know what to do with himself. Sport is destroyed when pits are closed.

I want the Government to refrain from what they are trying to prove tonight. I want a real restructuring and proper money invested. Let us save the remaining mining industry so that money is made available to do the job properly and those who have jobs do not have to be laid off, as they have been since 1979 when the Government came into office and created real problems in the mining communities.

If the Minister comes to my constituency he will see the problems that the Government have created there, and he will see them if he visits Sherwood. They are particularly noticeable at Blidworth, where work has been destroyed because the pit has gone. The hon. Member for Sherwood agreed with that happening and did nothing about it. His constituents will remember that when the Prime Minister calls an election and will do something about it. I want the Government to leave the money from RECHAR to help the mining communities, as it is meant to do.

10.57 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): With the leave of the House, I should like to take up the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) on RECHAR. I know that it is not entirely a Department of Energy responsibility, but will the Minister say exactly what will happen about redundancies?

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) must explain his attack on the Labour party. We have said nothing more than what the Flowers Commission said when it looked into coal and the environment and what many other organisations have been saying for many years. It said that opencast coal should be limited. If the hon. Gentleman is in favour of it, he should be addressing the question not just to hon. Members who are present, but to his hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) and many more, including his hon. Friends the Members for Leicester, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) and those in the north-west of the country, including his hon. Friends the Members for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), and for Chorley (Mr. Dover), and the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, in whose area there are major plans.

The Coal Industry Act 1990, which the hon. Member for Sherwood supported last year, extends into the private sector the right for people to go out, look for and mine opencast coal. It will be a major problem in future years if it is not curbed. It is something about which the Government have done nothing.

I do not know where the hon. Member for Sherwood got his information, but I do not accept his argument about having to keep 15 pits open. Anybody who has studied the subject for many years will know that that is not so. That argument is used by the opencast mining executive of British Coal and people involved with private opencast coal mining, but that is an entirely different issue from whether deep-mine pits are being kept open.

I should like to place on record exactly what is happening at Monktonhall colliery. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) mentioned the Select Committee on Energy. When it sits to take evidence, any hon. Member can go and listen in the public gallery. I was there last

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

Wednesday, when the chairman of British Coal was giving evidence on the future of the coal industry and coal markets. He went into some detail about the position at Monktonhall as seen by British Coal.

The reason why the pit is in its present state is not that given by the hon. Member for Sherwood. Direct questions were asked about Monktonhall. Dr. Ken Moses, a senior member of the board who was present, told the Committee of the current state of Monktonhall. He said that the shafts had sunk and there were pit bottom roadways and nothing else. He said that it would take anything up to 2,000 yd of driveages to get a long wall face. The hon. Member of Gordon shakes his head, but I shall explain what is happening in Monktonhall and why organisations such as the Labour party and the Scottish National Union of Mineworkers are arguing that it should be opened by British Coal.

Some 1,000 to 2,000 yd of roadway must be sunk, which costs about £1,000 a metre. Capital investment must be obtained for face machinery that costs anything from £5 million to £7 million, depending on the type of equipment used. Dr. Moses estimated that opening and working one coal face at Monktonhall would cost about £10 million and £20 million—I wrote the figure down, although I do not have it with me.

I think that Monktonhall should be opened. The only reason why it has been mothballed is the state of the Scottish electricity industry and the stream of pressurised water reactors, which has created an over-production of electricity in Scotland. The electricity cannot be removed from the country, because the interconnectors are not strong enough to get it to England. Monktonhall is a national asset that we should hold on to. I wish that all the 500 miners could go back to Monktonhall next week, but to have to put in £2,000 each to open up the colliery is not right.

Another important factor, given that coal is to be produced there, is how it will be sold. Inevitably, it is likely to have to be sold through British Coal, which undertakes the major marketing for the private sector in this country. British Coal concludes the marketing agreements. It costs the private sector money for British Coal to sell the coal.

The best way of opening Monktonhall is through the public sector. I, like the hon. Member for Sherwood, would like to hear something from the Minister tonight to show that the Government are committed. If the colliery is not opened in that way, the project will fall flat, as have collieries in Kent and south Wales, where consortiums and international companies have taken them over. We have heard only hype and seen only failure. However, everyone should argue next month that British Coal should reopen Monktonhall. That is the way to secure its future.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I shall not pursue the argument at length, because the consortium will make its own case. It has established markets, and it believes that the operation can be successful. Whether it achieves success is a matter of opinion. However, if British Coal decides that it will not reopen at the end of June—that would be a sign that it sees no future for Monktonhall, as that decision would be based on a judgment that it could not get a return on its investment—would the hon. Gentleman support the consortium? Would he take the view that, in those circumstances, the consortium should be given a chance on the basis that the alternative is complete closure and the abandonment of the pit?

Mr. Barron: In those circumstances, my answer would be yes. As I said earlier, however, under the law it is not possible to have more than 150 employees at any one time in this context. The hon. Gentleman should know that, because he was a member of the Committee that considered the relevant legislation last year. As I said, the public sector offers the only chance, perhaps, of keeping the mine open.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Blidworth colliery made a clear profit of £2 million. The question that managers ask is where the £10 million came from for investment at the coal face.

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend puts the issue in a nutshell. As I said, British Coal gave evidence last week before the Select Committee on Energy. It said that the pit would be offered to a consortium, but within the terms of current marketing restraints. I do not hold out much hope, but I do not wish to be accused of pouring cold water on hopes for the future. I am in favour of keeping the mine open. That would be good for Scotland and good for the nation generally. There is the problem of overproduction of electricity in Scotland, but that will not be with us for ever. The solution of that problem may open the door for Scottish coal.

Mr. Jack Thompson: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) talked about thin seams. If he is right, it will be costly or uneconomic to install equipment to extract coal. Will my hon. Friend elaborate on that?

Mr. Barron: I am not sure about thickness, but the coal is mineable. I think that we should leave it at that. If the coal were not mineable, British Coal would not have spent about £500,000 a year to keep the pit ventilated and open after the work force left.

I hope that the Minister will respond to my call that coal-mining areas that are losing jobs should be offered help, including retraining. I hope that British Coal Enterprise Ltd. will support new jobs in coal-mining areas that are losing out.

11.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on his excellent contribution to the debate. He is the miners' friend. No hon. Member makes more representations to my Department or more assiduously lobbies my ministerial colleagues in the Department than my hon. Friend, the miners' friend. I congratulate him again on making a forceful and powerful contribution to our proceedings.

We have concentrated on the RECHAR debate this evening. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) for explaining that responsibility for local government finance rests with the Department of the Environment and the Treasury. There have been recent discussions between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment and Commissioner Millan about the United Kingdom's policy on additionality. As Opposition Members said, the Commissioner pressed for fundamental changes in the way

that EC grants are treated and to the British public expenditure system. Ministers have agreed to consider the implications of what he has said.

Opposition Members have been critical of British Coal Enterprise and have questioned whether the finance made available to BCE from the Government and the RECHAR scheme is adequate.

First, it is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) should criticise BCE. The management of BCE have achieved remarkable successes since the start-up in 1984—successes recognised by some Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), for instance, recognised them in a sedentary intervention earlier. The management have assisted in the creation of about 70,000 job opportunities in mining areas. In the job and career change scheme, singled out for criticism by the hon. Member for Rother Valley, on average 85 per cent. of those seeking another job have found alternative employment. Under the soft loan scheme, BCE has approved more than 3,000 loans to new or expanding businesses, including about 40,000 new job opportunities. Under the managed workshop scheme, BCE is supporting about 90 workshop sites on which about 10,000 people are employed. They provide a sheltered environment in which young businesses can grow until they are ready to move into a normal market environment.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Rother Valley seems to be under the misapprehension that RECHAR finance is already available for BCE. The United Kingdom has applied, as he knows, for RECHAR funds in respect of BCE. Those funds should be received within the next year or so. They have not yet been received, however, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ashfield for correcting his original remarks to the effect that they have already arrived.

Thirdly, the level of assistance to BCE, including a £60 million credit facility and annual restructuring grant assistance of about £5 million a year has been quite enough to fund all BCE management's proposals for job creation. The source of BCE funding—so far, it has been Government money—has not in any way limited BCE's activities. We shall welcome the RECHAR finance when it is received, but I make the important additional point that BCE is increasingly recycling repayments from successful business schemes backed over the past few years. In many ways, that is the true measure of its success.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley rightly mentioned expected redundancies. As the order, which allows the payment of restructuring grant for 1991-92, is linked to expected redundancies, it is only right in the current financial year that I should discuss the redundancies in a little more detail.

Hon. Members will know that it is for British Coal to decide what manpower it requires in the light of the tonnage that it can profitably produce and sell in competition with other fuels. The Government need, however, to make some estimate of the number of redundancies in the year in order to seek the necessary estimate provision for restructuring grant. This cannot be an exact science, given the uncertainties involved in the process of consultation and review with the unions and work force that British Coal goes through before any closure is finally confirmed.

This year, the total provision for restructuring grant, being sought is £300 million. That figure is estimated to be sufficient to meet the costs of about 6,500 industrial redundancies, after allowing for grant expenditure in respect of some 2,000 workers who left towards the end of the last financial year but who did not attract restructuring grant payments until the current year. The Government will continue to meet the costs arising from past restructuring through other grants. In particular, weekly payments to beneficiaries under the redundant mineworkers payment scheme, which closed to new applicants in March 1987, are not affected by this order.

The order must been seen in the context of the continuing changes occurring in British Coal's commercial environment and of the Government's continuing support for the corporation's firm and businesslike response to those changes. Although British Coal's latest results are still being audited, the corporation expects to have made a modest bottom-line profit in the past financial year. The corporation also managed to live within the external financing limit of £905 million set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the beginning of last year, with an expected outturn of about £889 million, representing a saving of about £16 million.

The average colliery output per man shift was 4·7 tonnes overall, an increase of about 8·8 per cent. on 1989-90. I am sure that Opposition Members will join us in congratulating British coal's work force on their achievements and in expressing our hope of more to come.

The debate on Monktonhall has been interesting and important. The complexity of the issue was shown by the exchanges between Opposition Members whose knowledge of Monktonhall is far greater than mine. I understand that meetings are under way and I was surprised to hear what the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said. I shall look further into the issue and shall consider what he said carefully. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for coal to respond. I give an undertaking to the House that that will be done, not least because the hon. Gentleman made some strongly worded and deeply felt comments about the lack of a response from the Department. I listened carefully to what he said and I am sure that others outside the House—especially British Coal—have also listened carefully or will read carefully what he said and that that will lead to action.

On one point, the hon. Gentleman drew my attention to my responsibilities in other sectors of energy, especially oil and gas. There is a clear statement of reserves in the report and accounts of the British Coal Corporation. In detail on page 8, under "Reserves"—I shall not quote it all—it says:

> "The Corporation's estimate of coal in place in the United Kingdom (that is in seams over 60 cms thick and less than 1,200 metres deep, minus coal which has already been worked) is 190 billion tonnes."

It goes on to detail technically recoverable reserves. It is valuable, not least because it parallels much of the important information available in the Brown Book on the oil and gas sector.

I have not covered every point in detail. If there are any specific points that I have not covered, I shall study *Hansard* and take them up.

I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With permission, I will put together the next two motions on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Representation of the People

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 16th April, be approved.

That the draft Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 16th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Representation of the People (Scotland)

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 18th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker With permission, I will put together the next two motions on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Estate Agents

That the Estate Agents (Undesirable Practices) (No. 2) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1032), dated 19th April 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th April, be approved.

That the Estate Agents (Specified Offences) (No. 2) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1091), dated 29th April 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th April, be approved. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Veterinary Surgeons

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Qualifications (EEC Recognition) (German Democratic Republic Qualifications) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 25th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ordered,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4084/91 relating to action to protect the environment in the coastal areas and coastal waters of the Irish Sea, North Sea, Baltic Sea and North East Atlantic Ocean (NORSPA) and 4548/91 relating to establishment of a financial instrument for the environment; endorses the Government's intention to take an active part in the NORSPA scheme and promote United Kingdom interest in this area of environmental importance; and supports the Government's aim to ensure that any new Community financial instrument for the environment contains clear and specific objectives, and respects the principle of subsidiarity. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Resolved,

That

(1) this House do meet on Thursday 23rd May at half-past Nine o'clock;

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 17 (Time for taking questions), no Questions shall be taken, provided that at Eleven o'clock Mr. Speaker may interrupt the proceedings in order to permit questions to be asked which are in his opinion of an urgent character and relate either to matters of public importance or to the arrangement of business, statements to be made by Ministers, or personal explanation to be made by Members; and

(3) at Three o'clock Mr. Speaker do adjourn the House without putting any Question, provided that this House shall not adjourn until Mr. Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of Standing Committees), the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee shall, not later than two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Matter of the proposal for a draft Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, put the Question, That the Committee has considered the said Matter.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Insurance Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

11.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I doubt that I shall compete with the drama and passion that we have witnessed during the past hour or so, but I nevertheless welcome the opportunity to introduce a short debate on the Financial Services Act 1986 and the insurance industry —subjects in which I have a strong constituency interest. Earlier today, I gave my hon. Friend the Minister a draft of what I proposed to say.

A primary purpose of the Financial Services Act is to give the public adequate protection when buying investment products and services. However, there is broad agreement that, as far as retail financial services are concerned, the Act is in some respects not working well. That has arisen partly because the practical effects of some of the regulations run counter to the original intentions, and partly because the market for financial services has evolved so quickly in recent years that some of the fundamental regulations require updating and amendment.

Consequently, the Securities and Investment Board plc is currently conducting a wide-ranging review and has recently received a consultative paper on the subject. I welcome the review and look forward to an amended regime which will, to quote Mr. David Walker, the chairman of the SIB, be "robust and enduring." The SIB regards the review as urgent, but because the issues are complex and require extensive consultation, speedy changes cannot be expected. There seems no question of a new regime being introduced this year. Although the SIB may disagree, past form gives no great confidence that changes will become effective much before 1993. Meanwhile, there is an important issue of consumer protection which requires immediate action. That is the issue to which I wish primarily to draw attention.

An important principle of the Financial Services Act 1986 is that every seller of retail financial services should be authorised and supervised directly by the SIB, or indirectly by recognised self-regulatory organisations or recognised professional bodies. That is intended to ensure that all selling practices conform to the principles of the Act and that the public should have a clear line of recourse in the event of a breach.

The self-regulatory organisations have their own rule books which must at least match up to SIB standards. One such organisation is the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, which has responsibility for independent financial advisers. Such advisers are agents for the customer and are required to fulfil quite stringent conditions to secure and maintain authorisation.

The second regulatory organisation is the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, which authorises the suppliers of financial services, such as the life assurance companies. It makes them responsible for the compliance of their tied intermediaries who may be employed salesmen of the supplying company, or an individual or firm that has contracted to sell its products. The tied intermediaries are agents of the supplier and not of the customer, and they are restricted to selling only the investment products issued by the supplier. Thus, the structure is complete. The independent adviser is authorised and monitored directly by FIMBRA and the tied intermediary is policed by the supplying company, which is itself directly authorised and monitored by LAUTRO.

For the most part, the structure works well. However, one area in which major difficulties arise is that of the tied intermediary who is not an employee of the supplying company. Such an individual is formally known as an appointed representative and is bound to the supplier by an agency contract under section 44 of the Financial Services Act 1986.

Appointed representatives in practice come in two colours. Some are organised as a formal sales force, although they retain their self-employed status, but many others act as independent businesses, whether trading as a limited company, as a partnership or as a sole proprietor. They come in all shapes and sizes, from one-man operations to large financial institutions. The number of firms that act in that way has been growing substantially in the past year or two. Their principal operations need have little or no connection with financial services. Such firms may be an estate agency, a bank, a building society, a travel tour operator or even a football club.

With the best will in the world, it is not possible for the supplying company to exercise the same standard of supervision and direction with independent businesses as the standard that it can give its own employees. Experience has shown that adequate compliance with the regulations requires close and frequent examination both of the business practices and of the detailed sales documentation of the appointed representative. LAUTRO has had to crack the whip more than once in the hope of improving standards, but without evident success.

My many contacts in the industry who are close to the situation simply do not believe that the necessary standards will ever be achieved in practice through the current regime. It has been put to me that the appointed representative, being an independent business, tends to resent and resist the very close supervision of affairs which is required. However, sometimes being unable or unwilling to meet the stringent requirements imposed by the regulations on independent financial advisers, the appointed representative has settled reluctantly for a contractual tie to one supplier. It will often be financed through loans from the supplier for commission, yet to be earned or for what is often described as "business development". Firms will often look around for the supplier willing to give the best deal and some will think nothing of changing suppliers if they get a larger loan or better terms elsewhere.

The supplying company is sometimes reluctant to be too harsh in its supervision for fear of losing a valuable sales outlet, which will often owe it a substantial debt, which may prove hard to recover. There is a strong conflict of interest between its duty to supervise an appointed representative and its desire to retain a profitable business relationship with it.

Yet that, although important, is only part of the problem. The Financial Services Act regulates only the sales of what it defines as investment business. In this context, that would primarily be life insurance, pensions and unit trusts. The supplying company is required to monitor and take responsibility for only those types of business. The appointed representative, however, may on his own account be offering financial services to his

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

customers that are not subject to the Act, such as mortgage broking, the taking of deposits or the holding of customers' money for purposes unrelated to the Act.

It is often too much to expect the general public to distinguish between financial transactions that are regulated under the Act and those that are not. Often, what to the customer is one transaction—for example, buying a house—will involve investment business covered by the Act, financial transactions not covered by it and, frequently, elements that are not financial at all. Customers are likely to suppose that they have protection under the Act for transactions when in fact no such protection exists. Moreover, they may well believe that the supplier to whom the appointed representative is contracted—perhaps a respectable and long-established life assurance company—will stand behind all the transactions. The supplier, however, has no such obligation in relation to any transaction not covered by the Act.

Supplying companies have often chosen to stand behind such transactions for the sake of their good names; but that is a shaky foundation on which to build consumer protection, and one quite inconsistent with the purposes of the Act, which were to buttress protection in financial matters with the force of law. It would, moreover, be wholly unreasonable to expect the life company to stand behind a transaction carried out by the appointed representative on behalf of another supplier, such as a building society, whose deposit-taking business was outside the scope of the Financial Services Act. Yet the customer is likely to think that the protection of the Act, and the obligations of the life company, will protect his interests against, say, the fraud or negligence of the appointed representative.

Having debated the matter extensively with members of the industry, and after long thought, I conclude that appointed representatives can be adequately supervised only by being directly authorised, and not by authorisation at second hand through the supplying company. Only thus is it possible to escape the conflict of interests that I have described, and to ensure the proper monitoring of the appointed representative's investment business. That authorisation could be given and supervised by one of the existing regulatory organisations.

Such authorisation would make it much easier to clarify for the customer which financial products came within the scope of the Act, and the opportunity could be taken to ensure the financial adequacy of the appointed representative at a level appropriate to his financial liabilities, together with the provision of suitable professional indemnity insurance. The buying public need the assurance that all intermediaries are adequately capitalised and responsible.

I do not propose any change for the employed member of a supplier's sales force. Because he is employed, the supplier can give its employee the close supervision that is required; can direct which classes of business that employee may undertake; and must, in any event—quite apart from the Financial Services Act—stand behind the employee's actions. Thus, the public are already protected, in the full spirit of the legislation.

I am aware that LAUTRO is advocating some proposals that are directly aimed at the problems of the appointed representative. In themselves the new proposals are good, but they suffer from a fundamental flaw; they still depend on regulation by the supplying company, not on direct authorisation. Without direct authorisation, no additional proposals will be effective in practice. Can we afford to wait while LAUTRO's proposals are finalised, implemented and observed in action, when all experience tells us that they will be nothing more than a palliative? Is that a risk that we want the buying public to run for a day longer than necessary?

I do not expect all existing appointed representatives to welcome such proposals, particularly those who are experiencing an unfair advantage under the present regime. But those—I am glad to say that there are many—who are scrupulous in their professional conduct will welcome the clarification in status that only direct authorisation will give.

There will certainly be greater expense, much of which will fall on the shoulders of the appointed representatives. We should remind those who jib at this that they have chosen to operate as self-employed individuals or as independent firms rather than subject themselves to the direction of an employer. There are great advantages in acting as an independent contractor, but business independence has its price, and those who practise it should be willing to pay that price.

To return to the broad revisions currently being investigated by the Securities and Investments Board, I notice that a novel proposition is being informally canvassed. It concerns the possibility of an additional class of intermediary which would act as agent for a limited number of companies—that is to say, a class lying somewhere between an independent financial adviser and an appointed representative. Direct authorisation would certainly be necessary for such a hybrid intermediary if total confusion about who is answerable to whom is to be avoided. Consequently, the argument for the direct authorisation of appointed representatives is quite consistent with the steps that the SIB is exploring.

In summary, I suggest that the current method of controlling appointed representatives through the actions of their supplying company bring about a conflict of interest and in many instances cannot be practically carried out to the standards envisaged by the Financial Services Act. I have further argued that the public are frequently misled, perhaps quite innocently, into believing that they have the protection of the Act and the strength of the supplying company behind them when this will often not be the case. It is important to rectify that, and the direct authorisation of appointed representatives is a clear way forward.

11.30 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) for raising on the Adjournment this most important issue, which is of great interest to the insurance industry.

Independent financial advisers, including those advising on life insurance and unit trusts, are authorised by the Securities and Investments Board or by one of the self-regulatory bodies or by a recognised professional body. My hon. Friend's worry relates to tied agents and appointed representatives regulated under section 44 of the Act. They are exempted from authorisation if they are

employed under a contract for services setting out the type of investment business and the clients the agent is allowed to approach. The insurance company has to accept in writing responsibility for the investment activities of his agent.

These requirements rest not just upon the rules of Lautro but also upon the provisions of the Financial Services Act approved by Parliament. Many companies using appointed representations ensure a good quality service to clients and customers. Like my hon. Friend, I am worried when things go wrong and consumers lose money. We all have an interest in seeking, where possible, to avoid such future problems. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that, with the best will in the world, it will not be possible to stop all fraud.

However, we can and should make it as difficult as possible, and concentrate the right resources on its detection to act as a deterrent.

As my hon. Friend said, day-to-day regulation by the SIB and LAUTRO is being improved in several ways. The SIB's new core rules lay down the basic principles for controlling appointed representatives. LAUTRO is working on new rules which will require that a representative's work for the insurance company must be carried out separately from any other financial business that he has. This may require different premises and different stationery. The appointed representative must also make clear on his stationery the nature and scope of his authorisation. My hon. Friend fears that that of itself will not be sufficient. I will ensure that the content of the debate and the report of his excellent speech is passed to the SIB and the SROs when they consider these matters further.

An appointed representative or an independent financial adviser registered under the Financial Services Act may sometimes carry out unregulated business as well. Therefore, insisting on separate authorisation would not entirely prevent the problem. None the less, it should be looked at. The Securities and Investments Board is currently doing that, because it is investigating the whole question in its thorough review of retail regulation.

I understand my hon. Friend's wish for speed in these matters, but proper consultation should be undertaken, because it is most important to the industry and to customers that the SIB should get the answer right. The regulatory system must be cost-effective and should not place unduly onerous burdens on financial service providers. That would merely serve to limit choice by making some business more difficulty, and would also mean passing higher prices to consumers.

LAUTRO estimates that there are about 90,000 self-employed individuals and a further number of incorporated appointed representatives in the market-place. If each one of them had to be separately authorised, the cost could become very large, and many thousands of individuals at present self-employed might decide to give up business altogether or to become employees. Such a development would be opposed by many interests—just as much as it is favoured by my hon. Friend and others.

I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's worries about the quality and style of regulation are passed on to the SIB and to LAUTRO. I shall ensure that they are taken into account in the wide-ranging review of regulation undertaken by those bodies.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LLANELLI BOROUGH COUNCIL (DAFEN ESTUARY) BILL
[Lords]
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Health Plans

1. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of health plans to meet health needs in regional health authorities.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): Every regional health authority has submitted to my Department a plan for 1991-92 putting forward its key objectives and setting out levels of activity to be purchased to meet the health needs of its population. Regions are also developing strategies to improve health based on health needs identified in director of public health reports, which are published annually.

Mr. Carrington: My right hon. Friend will be aware that inner London is facing considerable problems in adjusting to the new structures of the national health service because of the high cost of London teaching hospitals. Will he reassure my constituents that the availability and quality of their health care will be assured under the new contracts?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not fair to say that the problems facing London derive from the reforms. Everyone concerned with the national health service knows that there have been long-postponed issues to do with the division of NHS resources between London and the rest of the country, to which the reforms are indeed drawing attention. The regions and districts, together with the Department of Education and Science and those who have responsibility with us for teaching, must steer London carefully through the reform process.

Mr. Salmond: If the Minister is so confident that the planning and changes that he is introducing into the NHS have support, why are the Government so intent on appointing so many card-carrying members of the Tory party to positions of responsibility in the NHS? Are the members whom he is appointing a greater or smaller proportion than the extraordinary number of Tories who have been appointed to positions of responsibility in Scotland?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not particularly interested in the party affiliations of those whom we appoint. We have appointed a good many people from other parties, although not, the hon. Gentleman will understand, within my responsibility, from his party.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend aware—I gather from his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) that he is—that in my part of the world, in Lancaster and the north-west, we are glad that resources are at last being channelled to our area? We run our affairs prudently and are not short of staff or laying off staff.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right, and I do not think that, fundamentally, there is any division between the two sides of the House on the issue. There needs to be a fairer distribution of health resources across the country. The reforms are clearly resulting in our making decisions in London that have been long deferred by both parties. We must do that, but we must do it skilfully.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why will not the Secretary of State publish all the business plans of all the trusts and all the documents that have been submitted by those organisations to his Department? The public should know the truth now. The debate in recent weeks has been about that, so let us see the documents and let the public know the truth.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The debate has not been quite about that. There are a variety of management documents for directly managed hospitals and trusts that have not been prepared for publication. Many trusts are perfectly prepared to publish the documents, and why should they not do so if they choose? But it would be unfair on them to change the goalposts half way through and ask them to publish internal management documents that were not prepared for publication.

Child Abuse

2. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the Children Act 1989 on the handling of child abuse cases.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The Children Act 1989 will have a major impact when it is introduced five months from now, in October. It provides a proper framework to safeguard the child as well as the parents and will promote firm action to protect the child when necessary.

Mr. Day: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Children Act recognises fully the importance of the role of parents?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Children Act redresses the imbalance in terms of recognising the on-going responsibility of parents. Two new orders are the emergency protection order, which enables parents to return to court after 72 hours to put their case, and the child assessment order, which means that the child can be assessed without removing parental rights.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware that there appears to be a deliberate campaign of misinformation in certain sections of the press about the role of social workers in child abuse cases? Will he take the opportunity of the implementation of the Act in October to launch a public information campaign, setting out the rights and duties of parents under the legislation and also the rights, responsibilities and duties of local authorities and the social workers whom they employ?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly endorse the hon. Gentleman's point. However, the decisions that social workers must make are enormously complex. If social workers remove a child needlessly, they are castigated; but if they do not remove a child and it is abused, they are also castigated. Sometimes it appears that there is a ritual abuse of social workers.

In implementing the Act we are determined to clarify the rights of parents. The Family Rights Group, for example, has been working on a handbook for that purpose. We are also determined to clarify the role and responsibility of social workers. If they can remember that their prime duty is the welfare of the child and the need to have clear evidence, they may be able to avoid some of the pitfalls that have occurred in recent cases.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my hon. Friend consider, when looking at the aftermath of child sex abuse cases in the past two years, giving child psychotherapists a primary responsibility for identifying whether a child should be taken into care? I ask that because, as my hon. Friend knows, the modern social worker is a generic animal and does not have the specific child care knowledge that the old-style children's officer used to have.

Mrs. Bottomley: Skilled and professional workers should also know the limit of their knowledge and there are clearly times when they need to seek further expertise and advice. Our major implementation programme for the Children Act is unprecedented in child care. I recently announced a further package of initiatives, amounting to £1 million, to deal with various aspects of child abuse. One of those involves the treatment of victims of child abuse. The aspect that my hon. Friend indentifies is part and parcel of the matters on which we hope to make further progress.

Mr. Rooker: I think that the Minister appreciates that there is a good deal more common ground on that issue than on many that come before the House. What action is being taken to remedy the acute shortage of qualified social workers to implement the most significant piece of child care legislation for the past 100 years? If 50 per cent. of local authorities are to implement the Act on the financial basis of cuts or no growth, how will they meet the strict new timetables laid down by the courts for the detailed and rigid assessments required, given that shortage? How will the social service departments avoid families becoming child abuse statistics if they do not have the resources to operate what must be the ultimate user-friendly service?

Mrs. Bottomley: I endorse the hon. Gentleman's point about the spirit of co-operation that underlies the implementation of the Act. Because of the resource implications, this year local authorities, in their personal social services standard spending assessments, have seen an increase of 23·5 per cent., which is the biggest increase in money going into social services for 15 years. Moreover, there has been a 40 per cent. increase for social worker training, amounting to £50 million.

I recently hosted a meeting with local authority representatives, social services inspectors and directors of social services and talked about how we could secure the commitment of long-term social workers to the service. We considered manpower, training and deployment issues. Many local authorities could do better in deploying their existing work force. We have more social workers and more of them are well qualified, and we must use them as effectively as we can in implementing this important Act.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend will know that the Children Act arose as a direct result of the Cleveland child sex abuse scandal. How does she react to the fact that my constituents who were caught up in that scandal are still, seven months later, waiting for compensation? It should have been paid to them, but is being held up because of the solicitor acting on behalf of the local authority and the doctors involved, who caused the scandal in the first place.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend played a major role in drawing attention to the situation in Cleveland and championing the cause of his constituents. I am happy to report that when the social services inspectorate went back to Cleveland relatively recently, it was most impressed by the way in which lessons had been learned and the new procedures implemented. I have no information available on my hon. Friend's specific worry, but I shall take up the matter on his behalf.

Mental Health Foundation (Mid-Staffordshire)

3. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Mental Health Foundation of Mid Staffordshire national health service trust.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): We have every confidence that this trust will continue to raise the quality of care available to its NHS patients.

Mrs. Heal: Does the Minister agree that the only way to guarantee the highest quality of standards and services for people with mental illness is to ensure that the mental health services stay as an integral part of health and social care? We must not allow them to opt out, operate separately and sell their services to general practitioners and hospitals, thus providing a fragmented service that will allow patients to fall through the net.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady that mental health services must be an integrated part of the national health service, which is where they remain when they are run by NHS trusts. I hoped that the hon. Lady would use the opportunity of her question this afternoon to welcome the fact that the trust has already employed 20 additional staff in the mental health services of Staffordshire since 1 April and is committed to a further 20 staff before the end of this year. I hoped that she might also welcome the commitment to quality of service by the trust which is shown by the introduction of patient questionnaires, regular surveys of long-stay patients and a medical audit, the setting of standards and by the facts that 90 per cent. of all staff have attended training on quality

and public meetings are being held every two months. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would welcome at least some of those facts.

Guy's and Lewisham NHS Trust

4. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Guy's and Lewisham national health service trust.

Mr. Waldegrave: The long-term future of the Guy's and Lewisham national health service trust will ultimately be determined by the willingness of districts and GP's to send patients there.

I am confident that the managers and clinicians at Guy's and Lewisham will continue to ensure that high-quality, cost-effective patient care is provided to meet the needs both of local people and of patients from further afield.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Secretary of State guarantee that no two-tier service will develop in Lewisham? Is he aware that the two fund-holding general practitioners from Bromley have applied to the trust for a contract that not only asks for accelerated waiting times but demands that all their patients are seen by locum consultants and senior registrars? Will he instruct the trust not to accept that contract, or does he believe that my constituents deserve a second-rate service?

Mr. Waldegrave: I should have thought that the hon. Lady might welcome the new and better services that many of her constituents are receiving and would turn to the districts and say that they should match that performance in their contracts. It is a pity that she did not mention, for example, the new children's unit that is to be opened at Lewisham hospital this week to replace the 119-year-old unit at Sydenham hospital—perhaps she will be at its opening.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is dangerous, cynical, electioneering nonsense to talk about a two-tier system? Will my right hon. Friend make it 100 per cent. and unequivocally clear that the health service trusts are not opting out of the health service and are beholden not to big business, property developers or shareholders but to the best possible care of patients?

Mr. Waldegrave: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, if they are opting out of anything, it is bureaucracy. As every doctor must have been trained in an independent, board-run hospital, it strikes me as ironic that so many of them seem to find the idea surprising.

Ms. Harman: Will the Secretary of State answer the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock)? Will there be queue-jumping at Guy's and Lewisham, which will mean that, instead of patients being treated according to clinical need, some patients will have to wait longer and be treated by more junior members of staff because a minority will be able to jump the queue? Is that the system that we shall see at Guy's and Lewisham?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady is confused. It is for Guy's and Lewisham, as a hospital trust, to set its proper priorities for clinical care. Those who are seeking better treatment for patients, whether they are districts or GP fund holders, are doing their best for their patients and should be encouraged to do so.

Severely Disabled People

5. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements will ensure severely disabled people have control over their own personal assistance arrangements under the community care proposals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Our guidance to local authorities emphasises that service users, including severely disabled people and their carers, should be involved as closely as possible in decisions about what services should be provided to them individually. Section 46 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 also requires that local authorities consult representatives of users and carers in preparing their community care plans.

Mr. Hannam: Does my hon. Friend accept that when local authorities cannot provide the personal assistance that severely disabled people need if they are to live independent lives in the community, the present practice is that those local authorities can make cash payments to allow disabled people to buy in those services—and that that should be allowed to continue? Does she recall that she and other Ministers and the Audit Commission supported that idea in principle, and will she look for a way of putting it on a statutory basis?

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend is well aware, it has not been possible to find a way to break the long-standing tradition in which local authority social service departments provide services and social security departments provide financial resources. As my hon. Friend knows, I am most sympathetic to the approach that says that those who are severely disabled should feel as far as possible in control of their destiny and of the care that they receive. In our practice guidance we shall emphasise that as strongly as we can.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Lady accept that for such disabled people to have a real choice they need consultation and representation of the sort embodied in the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986? The section to which she referred does not go anything like as far as that Act in ensuring that disabled people's voices are adequately heard so as to ensure valid choice for them.

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not accept that. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) in which many of these issues were discussed. Since the passage of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act, care for and understanding of disabled people have moved forward at a great pace and the philosophy of "Does he take sugar?" is, I hope, a thing of the past. The National Health Service and Community Care Act overtakes the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act; but we shall of course keep the matter under review once the formal requirements to consult the users and the carers on plans and assessments have been implemented. The local authority associations have been given a clear commitment, as have others

concerned with the disabled, that we shall continue to review the matter once community care is fully implemented.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is the hon. Lady aware that the fundamental issue here is one of human dignity and independent living for disabled people? How does she respond to the letter in *The Times* from her hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), published last Thursday, about the need to end the legal impasse? Is she aware of the widely held view among disabled people, as reported by the Spinal Injuries Association, that the Government's attitude on this issue is "patronising and ill conceived"? Will she act now to give them both choice and the fullest possible control over their own lives?

Mrs. Bottomley: I very much hope that all the energy and commitment of the many organisations concerned with disabled people will be transformed into working with local authorities and their community care plans. Local authorities must have those plans drawn up within the year. They have to consult users and carers in that work, and I believe that the special protected position of disabled people under the Act should be broadened to ensure that community care moves forward as fast as possible.

Waiting Lists

6. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted on the relationship between the length of national health service waiting lists and the availability of private practice.

12. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will initiate a study into the effects of the availability of private practice on national health service waiting lists.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have not conducted, nor do we plan to conduct, any research into the relationship between private practice and national health service waiting lists. However, we are determined to tackle long waiting times for NHS treatment. The NHS management executive is agreeing tough targets with all 14 regional health authorities for substantial reductions, by March 1992, in the numbers waiting over one year for treatment.

Mr. Marshall: Is not it a disgrace that, three months after John Yates, the Government's former waiting list expert, drew attention to the fact that private practice by national health service consultants may be leading to longer waiting lists for NHS patients, the Government have done nothing about it? The Secretary of State's reply is just not good enough. Will he assure the House that an immediate investigation will be carried out into this matter, or does he simply intend to expand his party's two-tier health service, which means priority for private patients and longer waiting lists for national health service patients?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has exactly and correctly reported Mr. Yates's views. If the hon. Gentleman will produce evidence to back what he says, I shall look into it. The hon. Gentleman presents yet a further argument in favour of national health service trusts. Those trusts will hold the contracts for their consultants, and it will be open to them to negotiate with their consultants if they wish to see them carrying out more national health service work.

Mr. Patchett: Given the evidence of Mr. John Yates to the Select Committee, does not the Minister recognise the need for a study of this matter and the possible dire consequences to the health service if it is ignored?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that my previous reply answers the hon. Gentleman's question. If the baying of Opposition Members over the issue of independent practice by doctors were drawn to the attention of the British Medical Association, it might dampen the association's enthusiasm for anything that might lead to a Labour Government.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that whenever the Public Accounts Committee has looked at any alleged negative relationship it has found none? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the whole issue of waiting lists is simplifed so that health authorities who remove people from the waiting lists are paid after they have performed the required service?

Mr. Waldegrave: I confirm that my hon. Friend is right. There has never been any evidence to show what has been alleged. There is unfair reporting of the matter. One of the newspapers that supports the Opposition, the *Daily Mirror*, reports another of Mr. Yates's ideas, which is to give incentives to doctors who do well in reducing waiting lists. However, the *Daily Mirror* reports that in most unfair terms as being a dreadful thing to do. I am not sure whether the Labour party is in favour of Mr. Yates or against him.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend not be drawn along lines that confuse the issue but confirm that the national health service is what it says it is, what it has always been and what it always will be—a service that is available when needed and free at the point of need?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have no difficulty in fully endorsing that. In response to these questions, I re-endorse an element of the policy of the national health service's founding Minister, Mr. Aneurin Bevan, who made a historic compromise with consultants when he allowed them independent practice in NHS hospitals.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Secretary of State aware that the BMA does not represent consultants? If he wants to know what consultants think, he should talk to their representative groups. Would he ask them to explain why, over a recent holiday weekend, the trust in my area simply stopped taking in patients because it did not have a senior registrar available to do the work?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that Mr. John Chawner would be confused to be described as not representing consultants. He regards that as his job and he certainly represented them when he saw me a few days ago. I am willing to admit that, in the few weeks in which they have been in existence, the trusts have not solved all the problems of the national health service. There are still problems, but I assure the hon. Lady that the management delivered by her NHS trust will be much better than the traditional management, which created these problems in the first place.

NHS Funding

7. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the real growth in capital spending in the national health service since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Gross capital expenditure in the national health service in England has grown by 62 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that it includes more than £40 million-worth of new capital investment in the North Hertfordshire district health authority area? Those projects are well appreciated by those who live in the areas concerned, especially as the projects were cancelled by the Labour Government.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right in his figures and in drawing a favourable comparison between our record and that of our predecessors. In the past 12 years, capital investment has increased by 62 per cent. in real terms while under the Labour Government it decreased by 16 per cent. in five years.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Minister agree, that as he knows all too well, in the St. Helen's and Knowsley hospitals area investigations show that capital and other funding has always been undercut? Now that we have hospital trusts—both hospitals have opted out—are we to understand that the hospitals will get no more capital and that there is no hope of our ever having the capital that we should have had over the past 15 years?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has not quite caught up with the Leader of the Opposition. The funding argument is over. The Labour party is clearly on the record as saying that an incoming Labour Government would have no new money for the national health service. The question that the hon. Gentleman asked me is one that he should put equally to the Opposition Front Bench.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that while, we welcome the additional resources that have been made available in the eastern region, in formulating hospital policy big is not necessarily beautiful? I cite, for example, the unsatisfactory proposal to move the world famous Papworth hospital into the already over-large Addenbrooke's hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that big is not necessarily beautiful. In designing future NHS provision, it is important to ensure that it meets the identified needs of patients. That is the priority that we have established through the establishment of the purchaser-provider split. We have ensured that it is the principal responsibility of the new health authorities.

NHS and Community Care Act

8. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of local authorities to discuss the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ministers regularly meet representatives of local authority associations to discuss a range of matters, including community care implementation. They last met them on 16 April.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister recall telling the Leonard Cheshire Foundation conference recently that caring and costing are related? If so, what has she told local authorities about community care? More than half the local authorities are having to make cuts in their community service provision and in their grants to voluntary bodies. Those cuts are necessary if authorities are to fulfil their statutory obligation to implement their part of the care in the community policy.

Mrs. Bottomley: I was honoured to speak at the annual general meeting of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, which provided an excellent example of care in the community. Perhaps those who were wasting money on the £1·5 million National and Local Government Officers Association's advertisement last week should have paid attention to it. In talking with local authority associations, we are discussing the 23·5 per cent. increase for social services this year, which is in part the result of phase 1 of the community care programme. We have taken the unprecedented step of providing specific grants for voluntary organisations which provide drug and alcohol support as well as introducing a specific grant for the mentally ill. In short, the meetings with local authority associations integrate caring and costing. We make it clear that the Government will support community care and we look to local authorities diligently to implement the policy.

Mr. Robin Cook: Has the Minister grasped the sharp increase in charges that social services authorities are having to make for disabled and elderly people? Is he aware that the average rise in charges for home helps is one third, which is four times the rate of inflation? How many elderly people does the Minister know whose benefit has increased by a third in the past year? Does it not make a mockery of care in the community if elderly and disabled people have to pay for the care that they need?

Mrs. Bottomley: What is clear is that local authorities need to think through their charging policies. As hon. Members will know, Derbyshire, for instance, provides one in three of its elderly residents with a home help, and charges nothing. There has been a dramatic expansion in community services, with an increase of 30 per cent. in the number of day centres for the elderly, an increase of 25 per cent. in the meals on wheels service and a 27 per cent. increase in the number of home helps.

As local authorities implement the community care policies, it is essential that they manage their resources effectively and well. The spending of social services departments has risen by 52 per cent. in the past 11 years. We are already clearly identifying the cost of implementing community care and, in turning that policy into practice, local authorities must ensure that they achieve good value for money.

Mr. Kennedy: When the Minister comes out with statements like that about the reality of community care, she seems to pay no attention to the findings of the Radio 4 programme "You and Yours", on which she was interviewed last week. The programme carried out an in-depth analysis of the subject, across the whole country. Does the Minister accept that—according to the clear evidence that emerged from that process, and the direct feedback from those who were involved and consulted, community care is in a catastrophic state because of underfunding and because of the delays to which it has

been subjected? Anyone who has talked to those in the local social services departments will inform hon. Members on both sides of the House of that.

Mrs. Bottomley: As I hope that all hon. Members will agree, the key issue is that the challenge of caring in the community affects all our constituents as demographic factors change and expectations rise. We must harness the good will of the community to meet those care needs, to provide carers with practical support and to ensure that our provision is truly user-led rather than producer-driven.

Local authorities, health authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector certainly need the two years that it will take them to phase in community care. We have already made a start with the mental illness and drug and alcohol treatment facilities, the training and the complaints procedure. We look to local authorities to work with us in a constructive partnership to implement what is a popular and very important policy.

NHS Doctors

9. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were working in the national health service in 1979 and in 1990.

Mr. Waldegrave: The number of doctors in the national health service in England has risen from 61,554 in 1979 to 72,446 in 1989.

Mr. Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that it represents a record of achievement, under a Conservative Government, of which we should be proud? More doctors are spending more time with their patients, and there are fewer of those patients.

Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House, however, that the taxpayer's pocket is not being misused to allow a tiny minority of doctors to practice politics rather than patient care?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the Government for the major increase in the number of medical and clinical personnel in the NHS. That is reflected in the many more treatments that have been afforded to our people.

On the Isle of Wight, my hon. Friend may have come across one general practitioner who seems able to spend a great deal of time outside his surgery.

Mr. Madden: Does the Secretary of State accept that members of the British Medical Association in Bradford voted by a large majority against the establishment of the Bradford health trust? Does he agree that the cuts announced so far—a £7 million cut and 300 redundancies—have done nothing to allay those doctors' anxiety?

Will the right hon. Gentleman now agree to open the books? Will he allow the publication of the business plan and the Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte financial report, and will he allow the Select Committee on Health, which is to interview the chief executive and the chairman next week, to question both officials fully and thoroughly about evidence that is published and available to them?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Select Committee needs no encouragement from me to carry out its questioning, and I am sure that it will do so excellently.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that there will be 300 redundancies in the trust. There is no question of that. The underlying problems of that hospital, which go back many years, are now being tackled by much better management, and the hon. Gentleman will soon see a hospital with a secure and successful future.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, under the old arrangements, a significant and regrettable minority of GPs treated their patients with less than the full care that we would expect and that the current much more positive response from GPs is already being manifested under our new arrangements?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that they were always a very small minority. The new GP contract, which is delivering major improvements in services to all our patients in this country, shows that GPs are providing ever better service. It is characteristic of the Labour party, I am afraid, to oppose the new GP contract.

NHS Trusts

10. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he is giving the Northern region health authority in respect of future applications for national health service trust status.

Mr. Dorrell: We have made it clear that trust status is our management model of choice throughout the NHS.

Ms. Armstrong: Is the Minister aware that there is deep resentment and anxiety in the Northern region about the Government's pushing hospitals to go for opted-out status? I am particularly concerned about the financial viability of the north-west Durham health application. Will he guarantee today that the business plans in connection with that application and others will be published so that people who now feel anxiety will be able to see for themselves precisely what the future offers?

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already dealt with the question of the publication of business plans. I remind the hon. Lady that NHS trusts have an obligation to publish reports to the local public. That obligation is entirely new—it was never in the traditional model of management of the national health service.

Mr. Devlin: Is not the situation in inner London rather different from that in the Northern region? In inner London there are 82 consultants and 420 beds per 100,000 population, whereas in the Northern region there are only 26 consultants and 260 beds per 100,000. Does that not show that in the past 10 years the Government, through the 39 major capital schemes in our region, have shown an unequalled commitment to the improvement of the health service in the Northern region, which is now being demonstrated by the number of local hospitals that wish to take on trust status so as better to serve their local population?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the difference between experience in London and that in the Northern region. He may be interested to know that experience so far of Northern region trusts is that the three existing trusts, in the six weeks that they have been in existence, have already created 11 new consultant

posts. One might have hoped that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) would welcome that.

11. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will gather information on the experience of national health service trusts, with particular reference to staffing and finance.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trusts are required to publish annual accounts and reports about their work. They are also required to submit business plans to the Department. They are free, however, to determine the number of staff they employ and to set the terms and conditions they offer them. We are confident that trusts will deliver real benefits to their local communities.

Mr. Foulkes: Would the hon. Lady care to estimate how long it will be before she receives the first application from the directors of an NHS trust to go completely private? Will she give an absolute assurance that if she is still the Minister and the present Government are still in power they will do absolutely nothing to enable NHS trusts to become completely private hospitals?

Mrs. Bottomley: I find it positively incredible that a member of a party that cut resources for the health service in real terms, cut the capital building programme and cut nurses' pay, should have the outrageous cheek to ask a question of that sort. I can give the hon. Gentleman a clear assurance that NHS trusts are intended to ensure better management of the national health service for better patient care. That is what we have invested in the health service for, that is why we have increased the number of staff, that is why we have improved the training, and that is why we are now improving the management structure —to provide better patient care. There is no hidden agenda; there is no intention whatsoever that NHS trusts should do anything other than remain part of the national health service.

Mr. Sims: Is it not a fact that the national health service trusts came into operation just six weeks ago and that, while of course it would be perfectly valid in a year or two to evaluate how they are working out in practice, the present campaign by the Labour party against trusts, when they have barely started, is completely phoney?

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend will know, the Opposition, having so singularly failed to deliver when they were in control of the health service, now indulge in a policy of scaring rather than caring. We have seen it all before. We had it with general practitioner contracts and with the indicative list, and now we have it with trusts. We on the Conservative Benches know that we are right to be carrying forward between management plans for the health service.

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the Minister confirm that she has again appointed Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte to study the information that she is receiving from the second wave? Will she this time allow the public who use the hospitals to see the report? Does she recognise that after the cuts at Guy's, Leeds and Bradford, the public this time will not fall for promises? The public will want to see the business plans to judge for themselves whether this time the promises about trusts are any less empty than they were last time.

Mrs. Bottomley: What is clear is that we have revolutionised the amount of information that is available about the way in which the health service is managed. We shall not make public the report from Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] It will be one of the many reports to the Secretary of State giving him the information on which to base his decision whether to establish a trust, the purpose of which is to satisfy himself that better patient care will be available. That will also be safeguarded by the contract with the district health authority, which is the champion of local people and improved services.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has excellent and detailed plans to increase spending on public services by £38 billion in the next three years? What would be the effect of substituting an uncertain £20 billion along with socialist cuts and taxes on earnings?

Mr. Major: If a £20 billion increase were substituted for our present plans, it would certainly mean a substantial reduction in services across the board, no doubt including the health service as well. On the other hand, if there is to be £20 billion in addition to the spending plans that we have proposed, it would undoubtedly lead to large and significant tax increases across the board.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister think that any citizens' charter should include giving people the right to vote on whether they want their local hospitals to opt out?

The Prime Minister: In view of what the right hon. Gentleman has previously said, I am very surprised that he has so little faith in the medical people who make those decisions.

Mr. Kinnock: Even the Prime Minister must know that the "medical people", as he refers to them, whenever they have voted, have voted by majorities in excess of 80 per cent. against opt-out. *[Interruption.]* I will provide a list later.

Does the Prime Minister recall saying, just last Friday, that he trusts the people? Why does he not trust the people enough to allow them to vote democratically on whether they want their local hospitals to opt out? What is he afraid of? Why is he always running away from the ballot box?

The Prime Minister: Why does the right hon. Gentleman always run away from the facts? He is wrong on the subject of medical people and, as for trusting the people, we have trusted the people to make decisions more in the past 10 years than any Labour Government ever would.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister now answer my question? Will he give people the right to vote on whether hospitals in their localities should opt out?

The Prime Minister *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is no use hon. Members' shouting, "Answer" unless they give the Prime Minister a chance to do so.

The Prime Minister: What a remarkable question from the leader of a party whose education spokesman would take away the right of parents to decide what nature of schools their children could go to.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To people in unskilled work, wages or a salary of £20,000 a year may seem very good pay indeed, but does my right hon. Friend feel that a level of pay of £20,000 a year makes a person rich—rich enough to be taxed at the horrendous levels now being spoken of by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: Only a genuine Leveller would think that £20,000 a year was rich these days. Certainly, no doctors, police constables, police sergeants, fire sergeants and others would think that. The reality is that average earnings and take-home pay have risen substantially in recent years. Only the Labour party could produce taxation policies to penalise people on modest incomes. Were it to implement all its plans it would be penalising not only people on modest and average incomes but every taxpayer.

Q2. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Ewing: As the Prime Minister has demonstrated his intention to hold the 1992 European summit in Edinburgh, would he also accept that Scotland's international diplomatic role could best be served not by inviting Europe to our capital city for a few days every other year but by enabling Scotland to play her full international role as a member of the European Community in her own right 365 days a year, especially against a background in which the people of Scotland have shown that independence is their preferred constitutional choice?

The Prime Minister: Scotland has played a very honourable role in international affairs as part of the United Kingdom for a long time and it will continue to do so in that fashion. I am glad that the hon. Lady welcomes the fact that the European Council will be meeting in Edinburgh. It think that the people of all Scotland, but especially Edinburgh, will welcome that too.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to raise £5 billion per year from the proceeds of privatisation in the next Parliament? Will he also confirm that if that revenue were not forthcoming, it would be necessary either to reduce public services dramatically or to raise taxes and to increase public borrowing to an unacceptable level?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It would seem from what the Leader of the Opposition has said that the Labour party is planning either dramatically to increase taxation or dramatically to cut spending on public services. Privatisation has not only raised significant resources to liquidate parts of the national debt but has dramatically improved the performance of the companies concerned. We shall continue with policies of privatisation. I think that that will be much more welcome to people than increasing borrowing on the scale that a Labour Government would envisage and increasing taxation, which is what Labour has always delivered.

Q3. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bradley: To ensure that a citizens' charter for the health service has real meaning for the people in my constituency, will the Prime Minister confirm that as 100,000 people have signed a petition to protest at the proposed closure of Withington hospital and its maternity unit, and as 3,000 people joined hands around the two-mile perimeter to protest about the plan, such overwhelming support will mean that citizens have the right to retain their local hospital and that the Government have a right and duty to honour their views?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, matters of that sort are dealt with in the first instance by the health authority, and I think it is better that they should be. What I can tell the hon. Gentleman about the citizens' charter—an idea that I first began to consider and to speak publicly about in 1987—is that it will provide far greater redress for the citizen than ever before.

Sir Richard Luce: Is it not becoming clearer day by day that the Labour party is coming out in its true colours as the party of high spending and high taxation——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must ask a question about the Prime Minister's responsibility.

Sir Richard Luce: Did not my right hon. Friend reflect when he got up this morning that the Labour party is coming out in its true colours——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is no good.

United Nations

Q4. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next expects to pay an official visit to the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so. However, I am in regular contact with the secretary-general.

Mr. Cryer: In view of the withdrawal of the Valiant Churchill class of nuclear submarines due to dangerous defects in their nuclear reactors, would it not be prudent for the Prime Minister to withdraw all Polaris nuclear submarines, which have identical defects in their nuclear reactors? At the same time, he could cancel the Trident programme and announce that his Government are supporting the United Nations—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should give the hon. Gentleman a chance to get to a conclusion.

Mr. Cryer: The Prime Minister could announce that his Government were supporting the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty; the 141 states which have signed that treaty have pledged not to deploy or manufacture nuclear weapons.

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Cryer: Billions of pounds could then be released for the national health service in this country and for the millions of poor in other countries throughout the world.

The Prime Minister: Someone spoke a moment ago about the true face of the Labour party. I think that we have just heard it. I happen to be in favour of our maintaining a nuclear defence. That will be our position in the future. I am interested to learn from what the hon. Gentleman has said that that may not be the position of the Opposition.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. King: Does my right hon. Friend agree that education, and particularly the quality of that education, are paramount in many people's minds? Is he aware that in Birmingham we have excellent grant-maintained grammar schools which are under threat from the local Labour council, which intends to strangle them to death so that there is no choice for the people of Birmingham, despite 96 per cent. of them saying that they want their grammar schools maintained? Will my right hon. Friend join me in supporting educational excellence.

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of that proposal, but I am unsurprised to hear that that is the view of the Labour local authority; it clearly has no concern for the views of parents about education—a point which the Leader of the Opposition neglected to mention. As a general principle, I agree with my hon. Friend that the Labour party opposes choice on assisted places, on city technology colleges and on grammar schools. Its top priority on day one, as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, would be to take away parents' choice to keep their schools independent of council control.

Mr. Ashdown: As the Prime Minister has registered that some in his party regard the proposals put forward by our European partners next week on monetary union as a fudge, and as one of his Ministers has said that they are a fraud, although many others will see them as Britain's last opportunity to be at the heart of Europe rather than its periphery, will he now tell us his view of the proposals? Are they a fudge, a fraud or an opportunity not to be missed?

The Prime Minister: We are at a very early stage in the negotiations on economic and monetary union and on political union. As to the proposals to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor told the House in January that

"the Government have made it plain to our European partners that we cannot accept any changes to the treaty of Rome which would bind us to a single currency or a single monetary policy without a separate decision by the United Kingdom Government and Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 470.]

Q6. **Mr. Michael Morris:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the evidence is that, in local government, competitive tendering has given the public good value for money? Does not that mean that we should have similar policies throughout the public sector, including the national health service?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has considerable knowledge of the health service and he is, of course, entirely right. Abolishing competitive tendering for support services would threaten the loss of the savings of £150 million a year that have been achieved in the national health service thus far. Opposition to those improvements and to efficiency improvements worth £400 million could only remove more than £500 million from the health service, year after year after year. That is the policy of the Opposition, but not of the Government.

Q7. **Mr. Peter Archer** (Warley, West): To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Archer: Does the right hon. Gentleman recollect that, prior to the last election, the Government gave a categorical assurance that if re-elected they would not increase VAT? Bearing in mind that, having been re-elected, the Government doubled VAT, will the Prime Minister invite the electorate to believe future election promises? If so, can he now say categorically whether the Conservative party, if re-elected, will increase VAT further?

The Prime Minister: Characteristically, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is telling only half the story. He utterly neglects to mention the fact that there was a precisely corresponding reduction in local tax by way of the reduction in the community charge.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (Enforcement of Overseas Forfeiture Orders) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (Designated Countries and Territories) (Amendment) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about an exchange of correspondence to which some of today's newspapers refer. Apparently, there has been an exchange of correspondence between my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Leader of the Opposition. In his letter, my right hon. Friend calls upon the Leader of the Opposition to clarify how the next Labour Government would spend more than the present Government by actually spending less——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I see that the hon. Member has a copy of "Erskine May" in his hands. So have I. Can he come to a point of order for me? I am not responsible for exchanges of letters.

Mr. Nicholls: It is indeed a point of order for you, Mr. Speaker. It touches on your responsibility for the Library of the House, to which "Erskine May", on page 196 of the 21st edition, refers. I have been able to ascertain that the Chief Secretary's letter is in the Library. Can you, Sir, take steps to ensure that the response will be available in the Library within the next 24 hours?

Mr. Speaker: So far as I know, it has never been the responsibility of the Chair to see that exchanges of that kind are placed in the Library.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for Health is still in his place. In answer to question No. 9 from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), during the chaos of Question Time——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This sounds like an extension of Question Time. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Bermingham: The point of order is that the Secretary of State, in reply to the question, indicated that a member of the British Medical Association, who happens to be a doctor in the Isle of Wight, ought not to perform his functions as an elected member, but should stay in his surgery. It has always been a convention of this House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for questions that are asked or for answers that are given, provided that they are in order. So far as I am aware, these were in order.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Lady wish to take time from that allotted to the Opposition?

Mrs. Mahon: On a genuine point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if you have received a communication from a constituent of mine who is writing to you about a £364,000 city grant given to Barratt, the building company, to build homes in my constituency. My constituent wrote to you because of serious allegations that have arisen in recent days. On receipt of that communication, would you allow time for an inquiry into those allegations about the misuse of public funds?

Mr. Speaker: I have to say that I have not received that letter, although I receive a wide range of letters from members of the general public. At first sight, I cannot see that it has much to do with me. However, when I receive the letter, I shall consider it carefully.

Opposition Day

[11TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Health Service and Community Care

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

Many right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to participate. I have no authority to propose a 10-minute limit on speeches in a half-day debate, but I hope that hon. Members who are called to speak will be brief so that many of their colleagues can participate. What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order?

Mr. Mitchell: I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker. There is a ten-minute Bill on the Order Paper in the name of a Labour Member.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said that it is perfectly in order for an hon. Member who, for good reasons which he has explained to me cannot be present, to withdraw his motion.

Mr. Mitchell: The point on which I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, is that the Bill dealt with removing restrictions on immigration. It is extremely offensive to me, to many of my hon. Friends and to many of my constituents. It is, however, an important matter, and I seek your guidance as to whether it might be——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is perfectly in order for an hon. Member who cannot be present not to move his motion, and that is what has happened today. Nothing out of order has occurred.

3.36 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That this House records its concern at the damage to the National Health Service from the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act; condemns the pressure created by the new system for a two-tier health service in which waiting time is determined not by clinical need but by commercial priorities; is disturbed that the introduction of block contracts had reduced patient choice of hospital and restricted general practitioners' freedom of referral; regrets the shortage of people representative of their local community among the businessmen appointed by Her Majesty's Government to decide local health priorities; notes with alarm the financial instability that has already become evident among hospitals that have formed self-governing trusts; deplores the decision of the Secretary of State to approve 57 health units for trust status despite advice that there were financial problems with 45 of them; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to abandon its plans for a second wave of health units to form such trusts.

It is just under four weeks since the House last debated health, yet so much has happened in those four weeks that it is almost unkind to remind Ministers of what they said in that debate.

The Secretary of State for Health took pleasure in the fact that the changes had been introduced with, as he said, "no significant problems." The Minister of State, eight days before the cuts were announced at Guy's hospital, announced to the House:

"It will not be long before the noise about trusts . . . abates."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 512.]

I took the precaution of checking *Hansard* last night in the Library in case a member of the Prime Minister's private office had been down with an errata slip.

My favourite passage was from the Secretary of State's speech in which he complimented the British Medical Association on—in his words—moving on and "becoming sensible." The Secretary of State will have followed with interest the views expressed by the new, sensible BMA over the past couple of weeks, culminating last Thursday after his meeting with it when it reported:

"the Secretary of State was not open to reason."

That is from the very medical people who, 20 minutes ago, the Prime Minister said should take the decisions on whether a hospital should seek self-governing trust. Try telling that to the BMA.

There have been two developments since our last debate, which have given Ministers' speeches a near-comic irony which they lacked on first hearing. First, events have exposed the gulf between what Ministers promised as a result of the changes and the real effect of the changes. Last autumn, staff at Guy's were promised that the hospital would make a surplus of £1·5 million in its first year of trading. A month after the new system was introduced, the same staff at Guy's were told that the hospital was predicting a deficit of almost £7 million. At the beginning of April, the staff at Guy's received a circular from Mr. Peter Griffiths in which, under the heading "We are friendly and we are fun", he assured the staff:

"The management cares, really cares, about people, about their staff."

At the end of April, 600 of the staff who had received that letter discovered that they might be made redundant over the next two years.

Whenever I refer to trusts as opting out, Conservative Members shout me down. I am bound to say that nothing has more convinced the public that a hospital that has formed a trust has opted out than the speed with which Ministers let it be known, when the cuts at Guy's became evident, that Guy's was on its own, that it was no responsibility of theirs, that what the board of directors did to staff jobs or patient care had nothing to do with them.

The Secretary of State cannot have it both ways. He cannot on the one hand assure us that trusts have not opted out and, on the other hand, wash his hands whenever they hit trouble. He cannot have it both ways, because his own reputation is on the line. He approved the very business plan that is now in such trouble. The Secretary of State has not been allowed by the media to ignore the crisis at Guy's.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): What trouble?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Member below the Gangway asks, "What trouble?" I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been out of the country for the last four weeks, but the rest of the nation knows that the trouble at Guy's is the turnround of a £1·5 million surplus, as promised in the business plan last autumn, to a £7 million deficit, with a 10 per cent. cut in staff and the dropping of

[Mr. Cook]

whole specialties. If the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that as trouble, I do not know what he would recognise as trouble in the health service.

I was intrigued to note that the Secretary of State has now produced a novel defence of the new structure. I paraphrase his argument, but the nub of it—rehearsed several times on television and rehearsed again a few moments ago at Question Time—is that there is too much hospital capacity in London, that the advantage of the new commercial competition is not that it will strengthen the London hospital service but that it will show which London hospital should go under. On that basis, it is no doubt sensible to throw in a few high-risk cases such as Guy's.

If it is the Secretary of State's view that the problem is that there are too many hospitals in London, I cannot imagine a worse solution than throwing them all out into the market to see which sinks. We cannot plan an essential public service by waiting to see who goes bankrupt. While we wait, as the Universities Funding Council reminded us last week, we could disrupt the training of a whole generation of medical students.

I must remind the Secretary of State that the House was not sold the Government's changes on the basis that they would show which hospital should close. The Secretary of State is still comparatively new to his portfolio. He is the third Secretary of State that we have had during the process of these changes. Now that the general election is unlikely to be held until 1992, we have time for a fourth.

May I remind the right hon. Gentleman, however, that the national health service review that led to these changes was born out of the closures in the winter of 1987-88? It was presented to the House as the solution to those closures. The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor was lavish with his promises. There were promises about what would happen after the changes—that money would follow the patient. As we all know, there is never any shortage of patients. The implication was that, when money followed the patients, there would be no shortage of money, either.

I treasure in particular this passage from the speech of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor in January 1990.

"Next year,"

he said,

"in April 1991, we propose to reform the NHS: the coming winter will end the last year of an entirely unreformed service. The winter of next year will not be dominated by cancelled operations, closed wards and cuts in services".—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1990; Vol. 164, c. 1124.]

Indeed not. The net effect of the changes has been to bring the cuts and closures forward this financial year from the winter to the spring.

A whole new lexicon of cuts is being used in the Minister's Department. I saw the other week an internal Department of Health memorandum which no longer talks about closing wards but about "downsizing hospitals". I noticed last week that Guy's no longer talked about specialties but about "reprofiling services".

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The flaw in the hon. Gentleman's argument is that the purchasers of health care in and around the environs of London have realised that they do not have to send their their patients to London teaching hospitals. They can send them down the road to the local district general hospitals. When the hon. Gentleman talks about NHS trust hospitals, he fails to look at the same time at the same problem that is being faced by those that have not yet opted out.

Mr. Cook: I have heard that argument before. I noticed with interest that Dr. Ken Grant deployed it in relation to the problems that he faces at Bart's. Hon. Members who represent districts in the inner city of London and deprived areas such as Hackney, which Bart's serves, find it incomprehensible that if, all of a sudden, there is spare capacity as a result of people from the home counties no longer coming to London, waiting lists in their areas for their constituents continue to grow.

They find it unacceptable to be told by the manager of Bart's that they will have to admit people from Essex in two weeks when they cannot admit people from Hackney within a year. If that surplus capacity is there, surely we should be using it for the people served by those hospitals.

I was recalling the new way in which cuts, which occur not just in London, are described. My hon. Friends who represent constituencies such as Bradford, Leeds and Newcastle have talked about the cuts that are now being made by trusts in their cities. Nor are just trusts in difficulty. One of the most breathtaking interviews that the Secretary of State gave in the wake of the crisis at Guy's was when he defended the trusts against criticism by pointing out that other hospitals that were not trusts were in just as big a financial hole. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his candour, although I do not understand why he imagined that viewers would be reassured by the news that trusts were all right because everybody else was in the same financial boat.

From a flurry of press cuttings on closures—I should refer not to closures but to the downsizing of hospitals that are now trusts—I single out one. That is about the closure two weeks ago of a ward for elderly patients in Bath. I choose that press cutting because the report was accompanied by a charming photograph of the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, shown smiling beside a plaque recording that it was opened by him in October last year.

I could find no better illustration than that photograph of the gulf between what was promised and what has happened. It was a photograph taken the month before the right hon. Gentleman became chairman of the Tory party, showing him opening a ward. That very ward, within four weeks of the changes introduced by the Government, has been reprofiled and closed.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): I recall that, only a year ago, the hon. Gentleman, when making a financial assessment of the requirements of the NHS, maintained that, if we injected just £3 billion, all our problems would be solved—that no reforms or control of union power in hospitals would be necessary, and all would be magic. Since then, an extra £6 billion has been injected into the NHS. Is he aware that, if he continues to ignore the need to reform the NHS, no progress will ever be made?

I am increasingly coming to the view that the hon. Gentleman is interested only in orchestrating events to take advantage of vulnerable people who depend on the NHS—*[Interruption.]*—and he is playing, as he knows, into the hands of the unions.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This sounds like a good speech for later on.

Mr. Cook: Will the hon. Lady allow me to intervene? I did not produce a figure of £3 billion but quoted the estimate of the National Association of Health Authorities for the cumulative underfunding of the health service. She was right to say that, when I quoted that figure in the spring of last year, that organisation's estimate for cumulative underfunding was £3 billion. In view of the hon. Lady's complacency about the funding of the health service since then, she should know that the National Association of Health Authorities has now revised that figure to £4·5 billion.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was seeking to answer a point that was put to him. It would be disruptive to have another question before he has finished answering the first.

Mr. Cook: I shall seek to give way to the hon. Gentleman when I can, as he is always worth it.

The figure of £4·5 billion is extremely interesting. The Chancellor of the Exchequer produced precisely the same figure out of a hat to deaden the political pain of the poll tax. If Conservative Members can find £4·5 billion to save their political skins, they can find it to save the national health service.

Mr. Oppenheim: While the hon. Gentleman is on the subject of funding, did not the shadow Chief Secretary originally tell the House that the only priorities under a future Labour Government would be pensions and child benefit? The hon. Member for Livingston then told the House that spending on health would also be a priority. However, the Leader of the Opposition has just told us that spending on the health service would increase only in line with economic growth. Is not the Labour party playing its old cynical game of trying to be all things to all men as usual?

Mr. Cook: I have the advantage over the hon. Gentleman, because I heard my right hon. Friend make his speech, and very well received it was, too. I know that my right hon. Friend said no such thing—*[Interruption.]* I merely seek to serve. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said that the extra tax that comes from growth should be used for health and other essential services, which is entirely different from the slant being put on it by the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State, who imply that the Labour party was committing itself to spending no more on health than the growth of the economy. As my right hon. Friend said, that extra money will ensure that underfunding can be tackled from the start.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I should like to return to my own speech at some stage, but I shall make a bargain with Conservative Members. I shall give way now to any Conservative Member who can explain to the House and to the country how the Government propose to find £30 billion to reduce the basic rate of tax, without ripping it out of the national health service.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: Yes, I knew that the hon. Gentleman would not fail me.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is a man of great integrity. After all, he voted against the 48 per cent. rise in waiting lists when the Labour party was last in office. Nevertheless, he has proposed a simple challenge. There is something called the Laffer curve, and I suspect that the last Laffer will be that of the Conservative Government. Quite simply, we have reduced taxes, as opposed to the plans of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who intends to increase them. In 1979, the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers were paying—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should listen carefully, because he asked a question——

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was challenged by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) but should come to the point, not make a speech which he might make later.

Mr. Hayes: I shall make it clear—in 1979, the top 5 per cent. of British taxpayers contributed 24 per cent. of the volume of taxes coming in to this country. Since the Conservative Government reduced taxes, the top 5 per cent. now contribute more than 31 per cent.—which means that there is more money for the health service. We are able to cut taxes and spend more money on public services, which is more than a Labour Government could ever do.

Mr. Cook: My question was about a cut in the basic rate. The hon. Gentleman referred simply to cuts in the top rate. We should welcome the insight that he has given us into what will happen if the Conservatives are re-elected —the clear sign is that they will cut the top rate. If the hon. Gentleman hopes to sell the paradox that he offers the House today, even to the good electors of Harlow, he must explain why, whenever the Government cut the rate of income tax, they have to compensate by increasing indirect taxation through VAT, which people who may well not pay income tax will have to pay when they buy their goods in the shops.

We have had good, clean, knockabout fun, which I thoroughly enjoy, but I shall now return to my speech. There is no better illustration of the gulf between what Conservative Members promised and what happened than that photograph of the Conservative party chairman. I want to leave the last word on the emptiness of the rhetoric that the Government wrapped around the reforms to Lothian health board, which has just dropped from its stationery and logos the term "Putting Patients First". That logo was dropped from all publications by the Lothian health board last week because, as its manager revealingly said on Sunday,

"management figures are sick of having the phrase used as a stick to beat them"—

[Laughter.]—my hon. Friends have missed the punch line —

"every time they make cuts".

There has been only one poll since the Government ran into problems with its NHS changes. Last week, a poll carried out by *The Scotsman* found that 58 per cent. of those replying believed that the Government changes would make the health service worse. A total of 9 per cent. believed that it would increase the health service. That

[Mr. Cook]

response makes even the poll tax—the Secretary of State's last invention—look like a runaway success in popular support. It is not the Labour party but the voters who are currently making health the main issue of the Monmouth by-election and who will make Thursday's vote a referendum on NHS changes.

That prompts me to ask my next question of the Secretary of State. Given the overwhelming rejection by the public of those changes, how can the Secretary of State persist with his plans for a second wave of more than 100 hospitals to opt out and form trusts? Why does he not let people decide for themselves in a general election, which not even this Prime Minister can keep putting off for ever? If the Secretary of State does persist in his plans, and as the hospitals contemplate opting out, will he let the staff at those hospitals have a proper ballot?

I ask that question because the Conservative Monmouth candidate said that such a ballot would be "sensible and proper". Does the Secretary of State endorse the candidate's view? I would not ask the Secretary of State to endorse all the views of the Conservative candidate in Monmouth—I realise that that would be too painful—but will he endorse this one? It looks as though he could do with a lifeline. Or are we to take it from the Secretary of State's silence that on that point, as on so many others, the Conservative candidate for Monmouth is an embarrassment to his party?

The second development since our debate last month——

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially in view of the pressure of time. He should not give too much weight to what the candidates in Monmouth say—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These interruptions take up a great deal of time.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: —given that the Labour party candidate in Monmouth is putting up an appalling performance.

Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that efficiency in hospitals is essential in order to give patients a proper service? Does he not realise that hospitals under the NHS have been unable to account properly for the use of blankets, penicillin or anything else allowed for in their budgets? Because they have not had proper hospital accounting, they have not been able to deliver the service to patients. Is it not right to insist that hospitals have proper accountability and economic controls? Surely that is the best way of doing things.

Mr. Cook: I shall make a deal with the hon. Gentleman. I shall offer to concede that, as in any multi-million pound business—the NHS is a multi-billion pound business—there are always opportunities—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I am trying to use language that Conservative Members will understand. There are always opportunities for geater efficiency and greater savings; I would not deny that for one moment. But does the hon. Member for Upminister (Sir N. Bonsor) agree that the worst cases of waste that we have witnessed in the NHS have involved surgeons being paid salaries to stand idle and do no operations, operating theatres paid for and equipped but not used, and wards lying empty because hospitals cannot afford to admit patients? That is waste and inefficiency on a colossal scale, which dwarfs potential savings on blankets.

The second development since our previous debate is that events have proved how right Opposition warnings were. We warned that the new commercial system would result not only in less choice, but in a less fair health service. We warned that, if hospitals were to survive by making money from contracts, they would be quick to give priority to the contracts that made the most money. They have indeed been quick to do that. There have already been several sightings of GP fund holders securing a fast track to put their patients in front of everyone else. One of the directors of the board at Watford observed as much, when he said:

"the board are aware that the implication of agreeing these contracts is a two-tier service."

Appropriately, that statement was made by the new marketing manager of Watford hospital.

There is a simple way to describe the new arrangements—queue-jumping. Over the past week it has been fascinating to see how Ministers have tried to defend and deny the double standards in patient care that break out on a waiting list when a market behaves like a market. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister was still trying to maintain that admissions would be made according to clinical priority—the only difference, presumably, being that, since 1 April, clinical priority has been decided by marketing managers. By Thursday, his position had been overtaken by the evidence. The Secretary of State defined a new bolthole for Ministers, drawing a distinction between urgent cases, which must be dealt with according to what he described as proper priorities, and non-urgent cases, for which it is presumably acceptable to use the improper priorities of the market.

Let us not deceive ourselves by the comfortable term "non-urgent". When we speak about non-urgent patients, we mean elderly women who are crippled and housebound because they cannot get a hip replacement operation, about middle-aged men who cannot work because of a painful hernia, and about pensioners going blind because they need a cataract operation. The right hon. Gentleman may describe such people as non-urgent patients, but they are people suffering from pain, discomfort and indignity, who want an urgent cure. How can Conservative Members justify admitting such people in order of commercial priority? How will they sell that to patients at the end of the queue?

It is not only GP fund holders who are producing the double standard on waiting lists. Last week, I published correspondence from Alderhey children's hospital in Liverpool, a hospital which formed a trust in the first wave. That letter bluntly told north-western districts that Mersey district had agreed to pay a premium for each case of child heart surgery. The letter said that, unless the north-western districts agreed to pay the same premium,

"It is not . . . possible for us to guarantee that any children currently waiting will be treated in the financial year".

There is no mention there of clinical priority.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am used to the stories that the hon. Gentleman puts about, which turn out on closer examination to be not quite what they seem. As he knows, for many years we have had money which is used to diminish waiting lists. All that the hon. Gentleman's story shows is that various districts were choosing from among

their many priorities those to which they would apply waiting list money. Some chose to put it into a specific branch of paediatrics and others did not.

Mr. Cook: I am not making up a letter from Alderhey hospital. Not only have I seen that letter: I have seen the reply from North Manchester health authority, which properly and vigorously says that that authority has a contract with Alderhey hospital. The pricing of that contract is at less than half the premium that Alderhey now demands for each case of child heart surgery. North Manchester health authority says that Alderhey hospital must now admit those children on the basis of clinical need and priority, and not on the basis of the commercial price that Alderhey seeks.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman does not understand. The hospitals told the districts that, if some of that waiting list money could be used for this specialty, extra wards could be brought back into use. There is nothing whatever wrong with that. It would not have threatened existing contracts, and more children could have been treated. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman still does not understand that.

Mr. Cook: Apparently I am not the only one who does not understand the letter from Alderhey hospital; nor does the general manager of North Manchester health authority. He lives closer to the scene than the Secretary of State, he deals regularly with Alderhey hospital, and he has negotiated a contract with it and is therefore better placed than the Secretary of State fully to understand the meaning of the letter, which states:

"It is not . . . possible for us to guarantee that any children currently waiting will be treated in the financial year".

There is only one way to understand the meaning of those words, which were addressed to districts who paid double the price. Such a double standard has no place in a public service.

Delays in children's heart surgery at Birmingham drove the Government into setting up the NHS review. Perhaps a two-tier list for children's heart surgery will finally discredit the outcome of that review and will demonstrate what happens when the national health service is run as a commercial business. Labour will scrap this market in health care and bring back into the local health service hospitals such as Alderhey which have gone it alone as trading enterprises. We will restore the NHS as a public service, as we have done before.

Before the Secretary of State tries his hand again at a historical novel and distorts the record of the last Labour Government, I shall tell him about that record. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to say that we do not intend to rewrite history. I shall quote from an answer received by my office on Friday from the Department of Health.

The Secretary of State will recall that, during an earlier debate on the national health service, he taxed me with the claim that, under the Labour Government, there was only one year when there was a cut in real terms in spending on health. The Opposition asked his Department to provide us with the figures on the real terms volume expenditure on the health service. As the figures came from the right hon. Gentleman's office, I think that we can be sure that they have been pored over to cure them of any Labour bias.

I have to report to the House that the figures produced on Friday in *Hansard* show nothing of the sort that the right hon. Gentleman asserted. Under the Labour Government, there was a steady increase every year in volume spending. There is one year, however, in which health spending in real terms fell by 1 per cent., and that was 1979, the first year of the Conservative Government's term of office.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has been misled. If that has happened as a result of an answer from my Department, I apologise to him. The figures are clear. I know exactly the mistake into which the hon. Gentleman has fallen. If the figures are taken on the basis of a calendar year, which does not include the additional moneys that are produced regularly towards the end of the year—for example, pay review bodies—the result is that which the hon. Gentleman has described. However, the year-on-year figures, which have been published for many years, show only one year in the history of the health service when there was a revenue cut, and that was 1977-78.

Mr. Cook: I accept that the right hon. Gentleman genuinely did not seek to deceive the House, and really believed in what he said. Knowing the problem that there might be in convincing him of the reality, I have brought with me the relevant edition of *Hansard*. It—*[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) is running backwards and forwards from his seat behind the Secretary of State to the Box, he being the right hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Private Secretary.

At col. *491* on 8 May, there is an answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who has been accused of misleading me. I wish to spring to his defence and to say that I have never known him deliberately to mislead. The figures are set against the years. The years are 1974-75 and 1975-76 through to 1989-90 and 1990-91. I think that the Secretary of State now has the answer in front of him. His Department provided financial year figures that do not record that which he suggested in our previous debate.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No; this is a private quarrel.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures show that there was only one year, 1977-78, when there was a cut in spending.

Mr. Cook: I shall read out the figures. In the financial year 1976-77, total spending on the NHS was £18,617 million. In 1977-78, it was £18,889 million. In 1978-79 it was £19,606 million. The figures make it clear that there was no cut. There was a cut, however, in 1979-80. The Government are the people who tell us that their accounting methods are better than those that are to be found in the health service. They are the people who lecture managers that they are unable to obtain proper information and proper costings of operations in the health service. At the same time, they cannot agree on the terms of a parliamentary answer.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall give the hon. Gentleman the gross total of NHS expenditure at 1991-92 prices. That is real prices. For 1975-76, the spending was £21,568 million. It was £21,689 million for 1976-77 and £21,155 million for 1977-78.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May we have one at a time—and would it not be a good idea if we got on with the debate?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been talking about the health expenditure figures. Is the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) talking about the undivided departmental figures?

Mr. Cook: I am talking about the NHS total figure, with which column 491 of *Hansard* has provided me. If anyone has got the figures wrong, it is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

You kindly suggested, Mr. Speaker, that, as we had plainly won this exchange, it was now time to move on. I was interested to note——

Sir Anthony Grant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I will not. I was interested to note that on Friday——

Sir Anthony Grant *rose*——

Mr. Cook: No, I must press on.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already pointed out that a great many hon. Members wish to participate. This is becoming a kind of Committee stage.

Mr. Cook: On Friday—*[Interruption.]* I must ask my hon. Friends to allow me to proceed.

On Friday, the Secretary of State produced a new illustration of the contrast between his Government and ours. He made a speech in which he attacked me as well as the Labour party—and vulgar stuff it was; not the stuff of which he carved his intellectual reputation at All Souls. This was definitely gamma minus stuff. He said:

"We have dramatically increased the numbers of doctors and nurses working in the NHS."

I am sorry to say that the right hon. Gentleman's ministerial colleagues have let him down again: they have produced the figures.

Throughout the 1980s, the number of doctors increased by 18 per cent. That is a comfortable increase, for which I will not deny credit to Conservative Members. During the period of the last Labour Government, however, the number of doctors increased by 25 per cent.—and that was over five years, not 10. The rate of increase was three times as fast as the annual rate under the present Government.

The right hon. Gentleman's colleagues have also been very helpful in providing the figures relating to nurses. If we take the increase in whole-time equivalents on the same basis, we find that, in the 10 years of the present Government's tenure, the number of nurses in our wards increased by 6 per cent.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: What about the numbers?

Mr. Cook: I am talking about the numbers. Under the last Labour Government, the number increased by 14 per cent., at nearly four times the annual rate. The Secretary of State spoke of a "dramatic increase". What superlative —what hyperbole—would he find to describe the record of the last Labour Government, which is three or four times better than his Government's record?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Cook: I will not give way.

The question for the right hon. Gentleman is this: how can he hope, at the next general election, to persuade the voters that he will do any better next time round, when sitting beside him is a Chancellor who wants to rip £30 billion out of public spending? Where will that £30 billion come from, and how much will come from the health budget?

At the next election, the electorate will have a clear choice between a Labour party that is committed to using the increase in revenue to restore the NHS and essential services, and a Conservative party that is committed to using it to pay for tax cuts. The need for that choice to be made could be seen clearly last night at King's College hospital in Camberwell. Yesterday evening, 14 people were admitted to the accident and emergency department. They had to remain lying on trolleys in the casualty room, because no beds could be found for them. Last November, the hospital closed 120 beds to meet the Secretary of State's deadline of 1 April for the elimination of the hospital's deficit. Those 14 people included an 89-year-old woman who was blind and had suffered a fall, and a 16-year-old boy who was vomiting blood. They were all lying on trolleys 9 in apart. That is the real price of underfunding of the health service. That is the real price being paid for the commercial priorities of this Government. And those are the people who cannot afford a 5p cut in the basic rate.

There is only one good consequence of the events of the past month: the Secretary of State and his changes have put the health service back in the centre of the stage. Some of his colleagues may well doubt whether that was wise, because the NHS occupies the fault line between our values and theirs. It is clear that some activities are too important to be left to the market, that there are some public services that are not just fairer but more efficient when they are planned to meet social needs and not driven by chasing market forces.

It is because, as hon. Members have just shown, they are incapable of understanding that the NHS is not safe in their hands. That is why the electorate now have a clear choice between losing their NHS under this Government or renewing it under a Labour Government.

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the progressive implementation of the Government's reforms of the National Health Service, coupled with substantial increases in resources for the National Health Service and in the numbers of patients treated since 1979; looks forward to the benefits of these reforms being spread more widely so that services everywhere are brought up to the standards of the best, especially with the further development of National Health Service trusts and fundholding practices; notes that district health authorities and general practitioner fundholding practices will both give priority to patient's clinical needs; welcomes the determination of the new National Health Service trusts to get to grips with long-standing management problems; supports the new role of district health authorities as guardians of the public health, accountable for arranging comprehensive care for their local residents; and endorses the Government's intention to set out a new agenda for the National Health Service which concentrates more than ever on improving the health of the people."

As the sound and fury of political debate declines for a moment, commentators are beginning to see that there are two issues on which the Labour party has staked out its ground. First it claims that its members would be better than we are at producing resources. Secondly, it claims that it would be better at getting those resources to where

they are needed within whatever constraints are imposed. Both sides are agreed that this service will remain cash limited.

The Labour party remains in trouble about money, as usual. The anxiety of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to appear respectable in the City has completely undermined the series of costed and uncosted, bogus and less bogus pledges made by his hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). Every lobby which writes to them gets a nod and a wink, indicating that there will be more money for its particular cause.

The pit into which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, with the able assistance of the Leader of the Opposition, has now dug the Labour party was demonstrated to listeners to "Today" yesterday, I think, when the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East was comprehensively carved up by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We simply do not now know what Labour Members mean by their spending pledges, and it is increasingly clear that neither do they.

First, our record in office is better than Labour's. Labour increased spending on health by about 1·5 per cent. in real terms; we have increased it by about 3·2 per cent. in real terms. We have done better than Labour said that it would have done in 1987 had it been elected. The Labour party promised an increase of 3 per cent. in real terms in 1987 and we have provided a 3·5 per cent. increase in real terms since 1987. Both in the reality and in the promises, our word has more reason to be trusted by the electorate then Labour's.

Furthermore, as has already been pointed out, the hon. Member for Livingston has failed to achieve what many Labour Back Benchers might feel it was his duty to achieve —to place the health service among the principal priorities of the Labour party in the run-up to the next election.

Why should anyone believe that the hon. Member for Livingston would be any better in dealing with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East if Labour were in power than he has been in opposition? He has not won the argument with his right hon. and learned Friend in opposition and he would not win it if Labour were in power. It is far more likely that, if the Labour party were to find itself in power, events would be just as they were last time. I stand completely firmly on the figures, which show that, in 1977-78, Labour cut spending on the health service in real terms and cut the capital spend throughout its period in office.

When I last raised that matter with the hon. Member for Livingston—it clearly distresses him to have to remember what happened when Labour was in power—he said, rather lamely, that he had voted against the 1975 White Paper. Well, his memory deceives him. He did not. He abstained. Some of the Opposition Members below the Gangway were more consistent. They voted against it all right. But the hon. Member for Livingston was not to be found in the House on that occasion. That once again shows that, when the crunch comes, and when faced with the equivalent—this is what we must and will prevent—of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) charging about the Treasury again cutting everything to ribbons, the hon. Gentleman will not be there on the night.

Sir Anthony Grant: I wish to refer to the Labour party's record—my right hon. Friend will recall that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was too nervous to give way to me in his speech on this point. Whatever the figures were, is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the last year of the Labour Government, at the famous Addenbrooke's hospital in my constituency, wards were closed, cancer operations had to be postponed, surgeons' records were taken over by militant trade unionists and many poor people were deprived of the services that they wanted by the behaviour of the Labour Government's supporters?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Labour party talks about a two-tier service, but when it left office, the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees were deciding what was an emergency admission.

The truth is that no serious commentator outside believes—I have quoted Professor Julian Le Grand to the House before and I shall quote him again because he is such an objective commentator on these matters—that Labour would be able to do better than we have done on overall resources for health. That argument, as one of my hon. Friends said earlier during Question Time today, is dead. It is unlikely that the 3·5 per cent. growth which we have achieved would be bettered by the Labour party. It has never been bettered in the past.

As Peter Kellner—not a commentator friendly to my party—recently warned, the Labour party should be steered away from the reef of criticising our health spending record because, he thought, our spending had kept up with GDP. I can tell Peter Kellner that we have done better than that. The share of GDP spent on the NHS in the United Kingdom in 1978-79 was 4·7 per cent. It is now, in 1991, 5·7 per cent.—a full percentage point increase. We are spending on health a bigger share of a bigger national product than ever Labour would or could.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is the essential point not how much the Government spend, which is a lot more than it ever was, nor how much the Opposition promise that they will spend, but how that money is managed? Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to tell the Opposition that there is not one patient who cannot see a doctor or who, having been to see a doctor, has not received the drugs that he requires, and that there is not one person who, having been to hospital, has not been entirely satisfied with his treatment, service and attention?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. As there is no real argument between us on resources, we then have to concentrate on how best to get the money to the patients, and that is what I shall deal with in the latter part of my speech.

It was only because I was a little surprised that the British Medical Association seemed not to have remembered the Labour party's dreadful spending record on health that I delivered a mild rebuke to it for appearing to join in the party political debate somewhat in favour of the Opposition last week. It would have been an odd alliance, since Bevan—whose great biographer, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), is with us —described the BMA as "an organised sabotage" and "a squalid political conspiracy". Barbara Castle, in her characteristically more moderate language, said that there was

"a loveless ness about that bunch that made me sick."

[Mr. Waldegrave]

Luckily, since then, the BMA has made it clear that nothing it said was to be taken as any kind of alliance with the Labour party; it was just inadvertent that it gave its press conference the day before the local elections. Therefore, that matter can be laid to rest. There is no contest on funding. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) rightly said, the argument is about how the money is spent. For a party which is not able to commit itself to an overall increase in terms resources for health, Labour has made some extremely dangerous and irresponsible spending pledges.

For example, I calculate that at least £175 million will be needed for the minimum wage pledge, and that may be on the low side. It will be £175 million only if Labour can restrain other trade unionists from maintaining differentials and many—for example, the electricians—have made it clear that that is not on.

As no real increase will come from Labour, that £175 million will have to come from patient care—it amounts to the annual revenues of about six district hospitals. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Question Time, Labour is choosing to throw away about £150 million-worth of savings by doing away with competitive tendering, which amounts to the annual revenues of about another five district hospitals, making 11 in total. That is what happens if one says yes to every lobby before one has secured the resources with which to pay for the pledges.

There is a long list—one might call it the nods and winks list—of all the things that Labour has said that it would do when any lobby has come to see them, although it has been careful not to cost them. That long list of things will produce cuts in patient care or it will mean that a large number of disgruntled lobbies will find that Labour's pledges meant nothing. The latter is the likeliest outcome.

Against that background of no more money, we must work out how we can get the money to where patients need it. In the past week or so, another element has been added by the Labour party, which says that not only will money go out of patient care to pay for its friends in COHSE, NUPE and the rest but it will take money out of the pockets of most of the professionals in the health service.

I am not sure whether Opposition Members are aware of this fact. We have dramatically increased doctors' and nurses' pay, as well as increasing their numbers. Instead of cutting their pay, as Labour did, we have put a considerable number of nurses into tax and national insurance brackets in which they would lose cash under Labour's proposals. Every GP and virtually every qualified doctor would lose considerable amounts. On the national insurance change alone, a top consultant would lose about £7,000 plus many thousands of pounds——

Mr. Robin Cook: With a merit award.

Mr. Waldegrave: On a merit award. I was talking about a top consultant. The tax proposals would lose the consultant many thousands more.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall complete these remarks and then give way to my hon. Friend.

Therefore, the hon. Member for Livingston owes professionals in the health service a further commitment, which he will not be able to fund. Is he going to make good their pre-tax pay to make up for the money which his hon. Friends will take out of the pockets of those professionals? That is what he is saying to them. Virtually all senior professionals in the health service will lose money under the Labour party's proposals.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend mentioned the fact that doctors will suffer under the proposals that Labour has revealed in the past week. Is he aware also that grade H and I ward sisters, who are towards the top end of the scale in London, will lose, because they earn between £20,000 and £22,000 a year?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those nurses deserve that money, and I am proud that I am part of the Government who have begun to put nurses' pay on a proper and reasonable footing. I shall return to the subject of the real cuts that the Labour party made in nurses' pay during its last period in power.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall give the hon. Gentleman the information, as he seems impatient for it. Nurses' pay was cut by 21 per cent. and doctors' pay by 14 per cent. under Labour. Not only do they face the prospect of further cuts in their real pay, as that was delivered by the last Labour Government, but under the "caring party", on that lower pay they will lose large sums of money in national insurance and tax which the hon. Member for Livingston is signally failing to promise to replace by increasing their pay.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: The Minister will be aware that the Northumberland ambulance service is now a trust. Is he further aware that the chief executive of that trust——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What, the spiv?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, the spiv and the personnel manager have given themselves 40 and 60 per cent. increases in their wages.

Mr. Waldegrave: If the management of that service deliver better patient care to the people of the neighbourhood by having more paramedics, which is what they will do, and by having better services, they will have earned that pay.

We see clearly the usual argument from Labour; it wants to get it across to the public that everything will be paid for by "the rich". When we come down to it, who are "the rich"? They are the senior staff nurses and the doctors who have just qualified. Those are the people whom Labour will hit.

The argument is not, therefore, about the overall spending of money; it is about the deployment of money. It has been easy for me to demonstrate in recent weeks that Labour has nothing to say about how to reform the systems in the health service for spending money to get services to patients better. Labour has set itself apart from modern thinking in all western European and other countries about the development and management of public services.

Throughout the western world—not just in Britain—people are seeking new ways of devolving management; that is what the NHS trusts are about. They are seeking new ways of getting cost comparisons and incentives for efficiency; that is what the whole internal market is about. Nothing in the health service is costed in the way that it

will be in future. Nobody knows how best to apply the money. Labour is against that. Finally, it is against providing real power to those who will use it most directly for patients and not for the defence of vested interests. Labour is simply defending the system which was designed in the late 1940s. It is defending vested interests and it has nothing to say on how to develop our great service for the future.

The Independent got it exactly right. It wrote:

"Although theoretically the British public loves the NHS we all know that it has been run too much for the benefit of producers rather than consumers and too frequently cannot deliver a decent quality of service. By introducing some elements of the market into the system the Government's reform will apply real tangible pressure for greater efficiency. Labour's own ideas for reform are essentially cosmetic."

That is exactly right.

More brutally, *The Times* put it as follows:

"The fear must be that in demolishing the new system Labour would be handing the service back to the tender mercies of NUPE, NALGO and the BMA."

So little to say——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Leaving aside the proper interests of collective bargaining, is the right hon. Gentleman trying to say that the health service has been run for the benefit of the doctors, the nurses, the secretaries and the people who work in the service, who are notoriously underpaid? That is what he just tried to say.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman knows exactly what I am saying. He knows that I believe that the service should be run for the benefit of patients and that those who simply represent the interests of the collective within it are not serving the best interests of the patients. It is that kind of argument which has led to putting off, for year after year after year, the decisions that have to be taken in London and that should be taken for the benefit of the health service throughout the country.

Labour has nothing to say itself on how to reform the structure and to make the systems more efficient. Therefore, I find myself in the happy position of defending a radical and forward-looking reform, aimed at revitalising a great public service, while Labour is left behind, carping, criticising and doing its best simply to scare people.

Mr. Marlow: On the point about scaring people, the way that the Labour party has been behaving over the past few months is reprehensible—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the Labour party is picking on those who understand these things least and who are most vulnerable. It is reprehensible.

I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has visited Monmouth during the by-election, but a pamphlet is being stuck through people's letter-boxes saying that the Labour party will prevent the local hospital from opting out of the national health service. As I understand it, if a hospital becomes a hospital management trust, it stays four square within the NHS. Will my right hon. Friend make that clear to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) so that he can get in touch with people at the printing presses tonight to put out another leaflet to let the people of Monmouth know what the reality is?

Mr. Waldegrave: Any such leaflet would be disgraceful and would contain a lie. There is no opting out of the NHS, and anybody who issues leaflets suggesting the contrary is simply misleading the public.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: No, I have given way enough.

I want to deal now with the two main points of carping that Labour, left in our wake, has undertaken in the past two weeks. The first relates to general practitioner fund holding. We believe in giving more power to general practitioners. That is why we started the fund-holding experiment, which put general practitioners in charge of how NHS money is spent for their patients.

On this issue, the Labour party—not uncharacteristically for that party, although it is a little more characteristic of the Liberal party—is facing in two exactly contradictory directions. On the one hand, the Labour party says that it is opposed to the principle of fund holding, on the grounds that it creates what Labour calls a two-tier system. On the other hand, the Labour party is in favour of allowing non-fund-holding GPs to make greater use of extra-contractual referrals—a facility that makes it easier for GPs to shop around to secure the best treatment for their patients. In other words, the Labour party is in favour of fund holding in one case but against it in another. That is typical.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: No. We have had enough contributions from the hon. Gentleman on this occasion.

How is it that the freedoms exercised by a fund-holding GP are devices, while the freedoms exercised by a non-fund-holding GP using his extra-contractual referrals are not? On this matter, the Labour party needs to get its thinking straight. Does it, or does it not, want GPs to have greater clout on behalf of their patients? I do. I want GPs in the NHS to have the same sort of clout on behalf of their patients as do those looking after people who can afford to go for private health care.

Many of Labour's supporters are clear about what they want to see. Let me quote, for example, Dr. David Colin Thomé, who stood as the Labour parliamentary candidate in Warrington, South in the 1983 election:

"The reason I find fund-holding attractive is not purchasing, although that is important. I am really excited because it will make us a better provider by reskilling us in clinical medicine and by developing a concept of one-stop medicine. Instead of saying that we want the best deals from hospitals, we shall soon be asking why we need to refer to the hospital in the first place."

Many of Labour's most knowledgeable supporters know that Labour has got it wrong on GP fund holding. In a *New Statesman* interview, on 22 March, Julian Le Grand called on Labour to give fund holding more of a run. He said:

"There are many, including some politically unsympathetic to the present Government, who are excited by the idea, for they see it as an opportunity not only to obtain more control over other parts of the health system, but also to gain freedom to try out many of their less conventional ideas that the NHS bureaucracy has previously stifled."

Exactly.

How long will it take the Labour party to recognise that it is wrong? It said, first of all, that no one would be interested in the scheme. Already, we have 1,700 general practitioners involved. Then Labour said that there would be great problems because the budgets would be insufficient. Now it has had to abandon that case. We have 7·5 per cent. of the population covered, with perfectly

[Mr. Waldegrave]

adequate budgets. The Labour party was wrong about that, as it was wrong about the GP contract. It was wrong also about the selective lists. Once again it was simply acting on behalf of any passing lobby that happened to write to it—in that case, the drug companies. On the question of GP fund holding, the Labour party said that there would be no benefit to patients. It said that GPs would not take on difficult patients, that patients would not like it.

On every count, the Labour party has been wrong, so now it has shifted its ground. Patients are benefiting, and the scheme is working, so the criticism has changed. The criticism now is not that the system will not work but that it does work. That is the new criticism. The experiment works very well, bringing immediate benefits to patients, so Labour is against it. When patients benefit, Labour's reaction is, "How dreadful. We must certainly stop that at once. We cannot have anybody getting better treatment."

My reaction is exactly the opposite. My question is, how can we spread this to all the other patients in the NHS? At the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Livingston offered some high rhetoric about the moral divide between our parties. What I have just said illustrates exactly the divide between our parties. We want innovation, with a view to providing better treatment for patients and spreading it to all patients; the Labour party wants to stop any innovation, lest it should work.

Mr. Robin Cook: Let us be quite clear about what the Secretary of State is saying with reference to the way in which the GP fund holding practices are working. He will recall that, last week, the Prime Minister said that patients would be admitted only on the basis of clinical priority. Is he, a week later, saying that it is acceptable to the Government that there should be a two-tier waiting list, that priority should not simply be clinical but should depend on the GP from whom the patient comes?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not know how the hon. Gentleman thinks the present system works. There is a variety of different waiting lists at present. The hon. Gentleman referred to a case in Watford. Now, a hospital will say, "Of course, we cannot ask our clinicians to do anything they do not believe is right, so we must improve our own standards." An admission limit of a week has been set for urgent cases. That is exactly how the system should work.

Mr. Cook: What the Secretary of State just said contains an extremely clear and very important qualification. Urgent cases constitute a minority of all elective cases. Does the Prime Minister's commitment that admissions should be on the basis of clinical priority apply to all elective cases, including the great majority, which are, as the Government described then, non-urgent?

Mr. Waldegrave: It may be that the hon. Gentleman still does not understand that we are talking about bringing into use facilities not being used at present, without damaging the interests of any patient, and bringing forward treatment for other NHS patients. If the hon. Gentleman is against that, he is against progress. But that would not surprise me.

In this week's *General Practitioner*, a general practitioner—Dr. Hawkes—says:

> "The argument that you have to stop improvements could be used against any pilot scheme."

Dr. Hawkes is quite right. We used to be urged to cross the Floor and have experiments on everything. If experiments work, are we to be told that we must stop them? Dr. Hawkes continues:

> "If we have proved the scheme valuable, any changes will be available to second-wave fund-holders. Any changes seen to be beneficial, especially if they are good value, could be copied by the DHAs, who will be under more pressure from non-fund-holders to do so. We will be running our own waiting-list initiatives, with money which will be divided proportionally between purchasers. We will be hiring local cottage hospital theatres, employing a surgeon and an anaesthetist to reduce the general and orthopaedic surgery waiting lists. Since this will be done using marginal costs, the scheme will be highly cost-effective, and there is no reason why the DHA purchasers should not do the same and benefit all our patients."

Exactly. That is what the people who are actually doing the job say, and it is the truth.

The second matter about which there is much carping is trusts. In the last few weeks, I have heard nothing from the hon. Member for Livingston, or anybody else, to shake my belief that devolving the management to the hospitals is the right thing to do, and we shall continue to do it. The *New Statesman* has already pointed out to the hon. Gentleman what it calls the weakness of Labour's case. It discusses the mismatch of hospital services in London—how, often, there is not enough community care, not enough local services provided in London, and too many specialties, with people being brought too far. That is the real issue in London. The weakness of Labour's case, as the *New Statesman* points out, is that this has nothing to do with costs. This situation has existed for 50 or 100 years. It applies to trust hospitals and to non-trust hospitals.

Everyone with the slightest knowledge of the NHS knows that we cannot, for ever and in every hospital, have larger and larger numbers of people. The medical services must be made available where people now live. As I said at Question Time today, it will take skilful management to readjust services and, above all, teaching and research, to take account of where the population now live. But that is not an impossible task. Better management will mean redoubled efforts to avoid end-of-year crises, to have money spent on patients. It may involve looking at labour costs. That would be quite right. It is patient care that matters—not employment patterns in the historic mode.

Even in this respect, the Labour party's campaign has failed. I have had a look at the reports of some recent monitoring. The hon. Member for Livingston talked about the terrible scandal of all these trusts laying off people left and right. As a matter of fact, there are 100,000 people working in the first 57 trusts. The total planned reduction in staff is about 200 net, so I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's fox does not run. Those are the outline plans; they are tentative plans at the beginning of the process, just as the reductions in labour are tentative plans at the beginning, when they may be necessary. They show that many trusts are expanding and some are contracting. That is surely right in the health service, which needs to change its shape and design to meet the new needs of the people.

Therefore, the great scare that trusts automatically mean redundancies is a non-runner. I hope that the trusts, including those in Bradford, will carefully examine their labour costs because there is no reason for them to employ

more people than they need if they can get the money to patients more efficiently with fewer and probably better paid and better trained people.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall not give way. We must move on, as it is 4.50 pm. I have already debated Bradford issues with the hon. Gentleman many times. He keeps saying that there have been 300 redundancies in Bradford, but he is wrong.

Another attack by the Labour party was on the contracting process. That is a bit thick, because Labour's line of attack on contracting is that there will be less choice —as if there was ever a Labour party interested in choice. We know from history—we have already been reminded today—what choice people had in the national health service when Labour was running it in the winter of 1978-79, when those attractive fellows were picketing hospitals and Labour was not taking decisions about clinical priority because the people who funded the Labour party were doing such things.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West says that there will be less choice, but that shows that he does not understand the contracting system. The system starts by measuring where referrals went in the past. There are discussions with general practioners who cover to the best of their ability—which will increase every year—contracts which follow the flow of patients which GPs defined in the past. If the GPs cannot fully cover that, they have the mechanism of extra-contractual referrals to deal with any further referrals which do not fall within their contracting. They will have enough money to do that, and that is how the system works.

The real purpose of contracting is that, for the first time, we have a mechanism whereby we can deliver health strategies locally and nationally. Those strategies will be worth debating in the House, unlike previously, when priorities could be set but there was no way of defining what would happen. For the first time, there will be public health authorities making agreements with hospitals, enforcing those agreements and measuring the quality, as in the Guy's and Lewisham trust where there has been access to medical audits to ensure that it is doing what it agreed with its district that it would do.

Mr. Madden *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: By its attack, Labour wants to stop the gains—at least, I am sure that the hon. Member for Bradford, West does—to people from fund holding rather than spreading them to the rest of the people, which is my aim. Labour wants to return hospital management to distant bureaucrats and, for good measure, to put it under the control of regionally elected authorities—that would be wonderful for hospital efficiency. Labour also wants to abandon the health contracting system which, at last, can provide an open way of setting and achieving local health priorities.

There is nothing worth detaining the House in any of those criticisms. As Professor Rudolph Klein wrote in the *British Medical Journal* this week:

"Much of the reaction to the NHS reforms therefore tells us nothing for good or bad except that resistance to change is as inevitable as it is predictable."

Meanwhile, I am happy to say that the NHS goes on not only building the new system but delivering improved health care.

I am happy to give the House and the hon. Member for Bradford, West the latest figures for infant mortality. Infant deaths in 1979 were 12·8 per 1,000 births. In 1989, the figure was 8·4 per 1,000 births and the latest figure for 1990, which I can announce today, is 7·9 per 1,000 births, which represents a further significant drop. The figures for perinatal fatality were 14·7 per 1,000 in 1979, 8·3 per 1,000 in 1989 and 8·1 per 1,000 in 1990—steady and useful progress.

I refer also to the work carried out yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State on one of the most difficult and thorny of all problems facing the management of the health service—the problem of junior doctors' hours. I pay tribute to Stephen Hunter, the junior doctors' leader, and to Professor Margaret Turner-Warwick for the progress which is now being made steadily to produce a sensible resolution to the problem. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the way in which she has helped to guide the discussions.

Last month, we announced the first research and development strategy for the health service. Under the sound and fury of all the nonsense of party politics about the poor old health service, there is co-operation with the general medical services committee on GP contracts, with the General Dental Council on dental contracts and with the joint consultants committee on a variety of issues. Work is being done in the regions by the deans to prepare —quite rightly—for the changes that will be needed in London. It is right that those changes should be made—let us listen to the words of Professor Rubin of the Queens medical centre in Nottingham. He wrote to *The Independent* on 13 May:

"Since its inception, this prestigious provincial teaching hospital"—

he meant the Nottingham medical centre at the University hospital—

"has looked after more patients with less staff than London teaching hospitals and has avoided moving into debt. Do you suggest that our prize should now be to see profligacy or inefficiency elsewhere rewarded by cash injections? Surely not.

One of the greatest achievements"—

we should note that all the consultants signed the letter—

"of the original NHS was to produce a more even distribution of high quality health care around the UK, but it never went far enough, with London in particular keeping its doctors which the patients moved away. A laudible aim of the new NHS is to put money where the patients are and thereby redress still further the imbalance. This will be painful. However, pouring money into hospitals that have lost their patient base would be a triumph of short-term expediency over common sense."

That is exactly what the Opposition stand for—short-term expediency over common sense.

The issues must be tackled—efficiency, the London issue, junior doctors and all the others. The test of commitment to the NHS is not whether one can shout as loudly as the hon. Member for Bradford, West but whether one tackles the underlying issues. We have heard nothing from Labout today about any of those issues. By the ruthless and irresponsible use of scare stories, Labour tries to hide its nakedness over resources and its bankruptcy on policy. The real argument is being won by the Government and I urge the House to support our amendment.

4.56 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Owing to my longevity and the constituency that I have the honour to represent, I think that I have had more exchanges with medical experts than any other hon. Member, and some of those exchanges have been of a personal character.

One of the Secretary of State's mistakes—it is difficult to select one from all the others—is that he does not take account of how the Government, in preparing their proposals, would not listen to those in the profession, whether they were the British Medical Association, the royal colleges, the nurses or the trade unions. Everyone involved in the national health service was told that they would have to wait until much later, but much later they were told that they could not have a meeting with the Prime Minister. One of the reasons why the Government are in such trouble is that they have not listened to any of the people who knew about the service.

When the proposals were first introduced, I remember going to see a consultant—I shall not say what extremity of my body he was dealing with, but I can assure the House that they are all working at the moment. I shall not identify the consultant, because I do not know how the Government would deal with him. When the proposals were made, he said that he hoped that the Government would not let British management loose on the national health service because that would be the coup de grace. Now, the same expert says that it is Mardi Gras for the accountants. That is what some of the people on the spot think of it. If the right hon. Gentleman had listened carefully to all the representations, he would have had a few different ideas.

When I had another operation, it took four hours to perform. Under the present proposals, that would be chalked up against the hospital and, no doubt, chalked up against the expert, Mr. D'Abreu from Birmingham. He happens to be the greatest expert on that subject. I should be interested in what he has to say about the Government's proposals for speeding up the operations process as one of the ways of testing what can be done.

As for what has happened to the physiotherapists, I daresay the right hon. Gentleman will produce statistics to show that there has been an increase in the number of physiotherapists. Nevertheless, I should question any statistics that he may produce. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) exploded a great many of those statistics in his speech. I have been very suspicious of the Government's statistics ever since the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) first got his hands upon them. I have never believed anything that the Government have had to say since then.

Anyone who talks to physiotherapists will be told what is happening. In one way or another, the number of physiotherapists in hospitals has had to be curbed. Anyone who knows anything about it knows that physiotherapists are one of the keys to providing an essential form of preventive medicine. The better the facilities for physiotherapists, the less we may have to spend on other services.

I remember a classic illustration when I was writing about the part that Aneurin Bevan played in the creation of the national health service. I went to see some of the doctors who had been most bitterly opposed to its introduction. I say this in particular to the Secretary of State, in view of his remarks today about the British Medical Association. It is true that Aneurin Bevan had arguments with the BMA, but he dealt with the whole question a good deal more sensibly than the present Government. He listened to the arguments. He also had plenty of meetings with the leaders of all the royal colleges —the very people in whose faces the door was slammed by the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor and the Prime Minister only a year or two ago. What happened illustrates a central feature of the NHS that the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends have never been able to understand.

One of those whom I went to see in 1960, soon after Aneurin Bevan's death, in order to discover what the BMA had to say about the arguments, was Dr. Roland Cockshut. He was one of those who had led the campaign against Aneurin Bevan and the establishment of the NHS. He said that we should not have a national health service and he denounced Aneurin Bevan for the way it was introduced, but when I went to see him in 1960, just after Aneurin Bevan's death, it was a different story. He said, "We didn't understand what the reality of the service was going to be; we were astounded—I am now talking as a general practitioner—to discover how wonderful it was to have introduced into our service the principle that we didn't have to care whether a person could afford to pay or not." He went on to say to me, "It was such a revelation —of course. I should have understood before. This principle is not only wonderful for patients; it is a liberation for every decent doctor in the land."

That is what the national health service was about. That is why the BMA's attitude changed—and all honour to it. It has fought persistently against what the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends have introduced. If they had had the sense to look more carefully at these matters, they might have avoided the whole of this terrible catastrophe that has befallen their Government—second only to the poll tax catastrophe. It is difficult to say which is worse. It is a tender balance.

This catastrophe for the Government goes back to the crucial decision made by the former Prime Minister, who decided to have a so-called reform of the national health service. She could not bear the idea of the continuance of a service that had as its central principle the socialist principle that no money should be charged and no market principle should dictate what was to happen to patients.

The former Prime Minister was so obsessed with opposing that principle that she would not even appoint a royal commission, or consult the royal colleges, or have conversations with any of the people working in the national health service—the trade unions, the British Medical Association, or anybody else. She said, "We are going to do it ourselves", so she set up a committee. If someone on the committee was not prepared to follow her —I am sure that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) would confirm what I say, as would anybody else who has followed the details of these matters —they knew exactly what would happen. Never before had there been the proposition that a major institution in this country should be overhauled by such a method.

The former Prime Minister produced for that committee plans that have now come to fruition in an Act of Parliament. However, it had to be forced through the House of Commons by means of the guillotine. It was forced through without taking into account the protests of

the few Conservative Members who had the courage to stand up against it. Worst of all, and most despicable of all, it had to be forced through the Cabinet.

One would have thought that a few members of the Cabinet—the present Secretary of State for Health at least has the distinction of not having been a member of that Cabinet, and if I were he I should continue to insist on that claim—would have stood up to the former Prime Minister. Some of the members of the Cabinet resigned on other issues, but not one of them dared to resign either over the poll tax or over the measures that were being taken to deal with the national health service. Not one member of that Cabinet of creeps dared to protest. That is why we are faced with this situation today, and most people in this country know it.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about having ballots. People in Monmouth know very well what the arguments are about. They are not being deceived by the Opposition about these matters. The argument is not that the national health service should necessarily be preserved in every detail as it was originally conceived. Nobody said more loudly than Aneurin Bevan that of course it had to be reconsidered every five, 10, 15 or 20 years to see whether it could be made into an even better service, particularly since, as he claimed, the NHS ought to be made into a democratic service. That is very different from the Government appointing managers, at high fees, to carry through any changes that they want.

We have never said that the NHS should remain exactly as it was at the beginning. We have always said, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston emphasised——

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foot: I shall give way in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston properly emphasised the fact that greater resources must be allocated to the NHS. I was very glad to hear him blow out of the water all the false figures about what happened under the last Labour Government. The Government have been peddling those figures throughout the country for six or seven years, so it is good that my hon. Friend blew them out of the water. Even more, I believe that the leadership that he has given both to this House and to the country is a fine promise of what he will achieve when he becomes the new Secretary of State for Health and a fine promise of how we shall sustain the NHS and its original principles.

Mr. Waldegrave: The right hon. Gentleman has talked in his marvellous speech about resignations. Did this poem happen to pass in front of him in the Cabinet in which he served, written by the present Lord Silkin and passed to Barbara Castle:

"All things bright and beautiful,
All projects great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Chancellor cuts them all."

At that time it was the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey).

"He cuts the old age pension,
Although he cuts by stealth,
And while he looks for savings,
He cuts the National Health."

I do not think there were any resignations on that occasion.

Mr. Foot: If the right hon. Gentleman wants to learn some history, he should go back further still—*[Interruption.]* We now have the Minister learning a thing or two. If only he had listened rather earlier, the Government would not be in such a fix. He has made the great discovery that the Treasury has always been against the NHS, even in 1947-48. The Treasury was against the NHS then and we had a big fight to get the necessary funds. The Treasury has never understood the simple principle in the context of which I quoted Dr. Roland Cockshut. The Treasury has never understood the principle that one could have such a system and that if it was run on decent and humane principles it would not put profit and the market first.

The patient must come first, and that must happen genuinely. To do that genuinely, one cannot say in advance how much the service will cost. We had all those arguments way back, before the present Secretary of State was born or even thought of. The Treasury was against it then, and there must always be good Ministers of Health to stand up to the Treasury. The Labour party has an extremely good one who will take office shortly—as soon as the right hon. Gentleman and the Government dare to take the issue to the public.

5.11 pm

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): It would not be appropriate for me to follow the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) in his historical reminiscences, except to note that he made no response in substance to the interruption, towards the end of his remarks, by the Secretary of State.

Labour's shadow Secretary of State set the tone of the debate in his characteristically knockabout, witty but rather superficial speech. He clearly demonstrated that the debate is more about politics than patients and electioneering than health care.

I remind the House of my declared interest in health care, as set out in the Register of Members' Interests. I confess that I have not been an enthusiastic or uncritical supporter of the Government's reforms of the NHS, but Labour's antics in recent weeks have been so sickening that I am grateful for this opportunity to intervene briefly in the debate. I do so for two reasons—first, to denounce Labour's cynical attempts to exploit and mispresent particular incidents and problems in a destructive and highly partisan fashion; secondly, to express my confidence in, and support for, the Secretary of State and his team of outstanding Ministers.

It will be within the recollection of the House that Labour pounced on the recent news of possible job losses at Guy's with undisguised glee and tried to present it as a general condemnation of the whole concept of trust status hospitals. What absurd nonsense that was, and it was quickly shown to be so by the similar job losses announced for the Charing Cross and Westminster hospitals, which remain under the control of their district health authority.

Another example of Labour Members' deliberate misrepresentation has been their continual use of the phrase "opting out", with its implication that such hospitals are no longer part of the NHS. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that a Labour Government would bring hospitals back into the NHS. That is nonsense, because no hospital which goes for trust status leaves the NHS. An hon. Member whom the right

[Sir Barney Hayhoe]

hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent praised as a future able Secretary of State should not misrepresent the situation in such a monstrously outrageous fashion.

I find it appalling that the media give prominence to such phoney propositions, when responsible medical correspondents must know the truth. Labour's spokespersons—among whom I include the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman)—accuse the Government of planning to privatise or demolish the NHS. Again, what nonsense that is; and how irresponsible and uncaring of Opposition Members to generate groundless anxiety among those who do not recognise how bogus such charges are.

The NHS is a much valued national asset which is, and will remain, a crucial and essential part of the public sector, largely financed from taxation and continuing to provide services free at the point of delivery, the aspect to which the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent referred.

As a former Treasury and Health Minister, I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary on the significant real-terms increase in funding agreed for this financial year. Over £3 billion extra represents nearly 50 per cent. of the total amount allocated to the NHS in the last year in office of the last Labour Government.

As one who has long pressed, in and out of government, for additional funding, I should like to see even further increases, not least for capital projects, including much needed work to the West Middlesex University hospital in my constituency, but I recognise the very considerable additional funds that have been agreed in a difficult public expenditure year.

There has been much controversy recently about what Labour might or might not do if—it is a mightly big if—it was returned to office. Fudge and smudge seem to be the order of the day, and the hon. Member for Livingston did not shed any new light on the subject in his long speech. He talked about underfunding but made no promise or pledge of extra funds being made available by an incoming Labour Government. Opposition Members do not quote a figure, and that was significant in all the hoo-hah and shroud-waving from the hon. Member for Livingston.

Not uncharacteristically, the BMA has entered the bidding with demands for what appears to be a speedy and massive increase of between £4 billion and £6 billion—wholly unrealistic figures, as anyone with knowledge of public finance must acknowledge. Interestingly, the BMA—not the doctors' professional organisation but their trade union—which I can remember making quite a fuss about when part of the review body pay award was delayed for a few months, seems to have said nothing about Labour's new tax and national insurance proposals, which could cost senior consultants more than the whole of this year's pay award—presumably permanently and not deferred for a few months. It would certainly reduce take-home pay for the vast majority of BMA members.

No wonder the Leader of the Opposition is being so kind to the BMA in return for the kindness of its leaders, who seem to be behaving in a remarkably partisan fashion—perhaps not wholly deliberately, but at least that is how it appears in public print.

Perhaps it is appropriate to remind the BMA that the only year in which there was a real cut in NHS funding—I return to the point so clearly made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—was 1977-78, under a Labour Government who also slashed the hospital building programme and remorselessly resisted reasonable pay increases for nurses. We should remember the Labour party's record when we see the nudges, winks and nods on the Opposition Front Bench.

There will always be health problems, whatever the politics or health care system, but there is a marked contrast between Labour's destructive and propaganda approach to those problems and the approach of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend is dealing with current problems in a sensitive and constructive fashion. For example, he and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have responded positively to genuine anxieties. I refer not to the assertions that the Leader of the Opposition made at Question Time, but to genuine anxieties about GP fund holders, who seek preferential arrangements for their patients.

I am glad to note the sensible comments of my right hon. Friend in the House today and in his speech to the Royal College of General Practitioners on 9 May, when he said:

> "There may well need to be some ground rules agreed about what can and cannot be asked for by a fund holder—or a district for that matter—from a provider. It is our intention to listen, discuss and, where possible, agree."

Many problems need just such an approach, such as medical education, the problem of London hospitals and junior doctors. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Health for the great progress that she has initiated and with which she is pressing forward on that score.

I hope that the Government will propose positive action for nurse prescribing. All of these and many other problems can be resolved by my right hon. Friend's patient and sensible approach. I shall support him enthusiastically in the Lobby tonight.

5.22 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Like the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe), I shall be brief, although he will understand that the similarity between our contributions ends there. I shall speak less about the Labour party's policies than about the Government's present action, approach and philosophy on the national health service.

It strikes me that, as we last debated health issues in the House only a couple of weeks ago, the element of predictability on that occasion has been reinforced today. Hon. Members have mentioned the warnings that were given when the National Health Service and Community Care Bill was rushed through with unseemly haste and with inadequate consultation on the likely cuts. They have spoken of the reductions in services and the fact that doctors' clinical decisions would be overriden. The indifference to community aspirations and to patients' views in particularly localities was bound to be a cauldron of political controversy, and has proved to be so. However, as other hon. Members have remarked, so has the scene of the current by-election in Monmouth.

However one views the Government's position on the fiasco of the poll tax, at least they could find a scapegoat and blame local councils for some of the difficulties encountered with local government finance. The difference on this occasion is that the fault lies entirely with the Government.

During Report stage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) introduced what the then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), described as a mini-Adjournment debate on Guy's hospital. Many of the problems that he predicted have, unfortunately, come to pass. It was remarkable that, when the controversy about opted-out hospitals—those first flagships—hit the headlines several weeks ago, the Secretary of State suggested that he was unaware of the details of the business plan for the anticipated levels of employme

If one went to a bank, building society or even a Government enterprise agency seeking support for a business plan and one was unable to tell the person making the decision that, within four weeks, 600 redundancies would be announced, that would be a somewhat deficient business plan. The fact that the Secretary of State did not know the details suggests either that he was not doing his job or that the managers who proposed the business plan were not sufficiently on top of their jobs. That hardly gives one confidence in the business of opting out or in the self-governing status of hospitals.

It is worth considering the management of the health service and what has happened to representatives of local communities. A survey by the British Medical Association, which the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth called the doctors' trade union, showed that, of 410 non-executive members of 82 district health authorities in England and Wales, 51 are doctors and 31 are councillors. By contrast, 164 were chosen for their business and accountancy skills.

I do not say that business and accountancy skills do not have a role to play in a service as massive and complex as the national health service, but when those new appointments are so loaded in favour of those who have no direct representative role for the local community, or personal and professional involvement in health care and its delivery, something has obviously gone wrong. As we saw throughout the country at the local elections, that has caused people to conclude that the national health service is not safe with the Government.

What about the financial viability of the trusts? The management consultants, Coopers and Lybrand, whom the Secretary of State asked to prepare the business plans for the first round of NHS trusts, concluded that only 12 of the 56 so far established were financially secure. The report warned that all but 12 have "considerable financial problems". Is it sensible to send out the boat against such a background? Clearly, London hospitals will be drawn into tighter competition, with uncertain consequences.

The Coopers and Lybrand report concluded:

"a number of hospitals could easily find themselves in this position and to some degree it would be a matter of chance which ones would be most seriously affected. It is not obvious that any closures forced would be the most appropriate."

In management consultant terminology, that is as politically clear a statement of anxiety as one is likely to get. We should not leave such questions to "matters of chance".

Moreover, the new management system does not come cheap. So far, £80 million has been spent on advertising and the cumulative costs incurred by the new appointments advertised throughout England and Wales. In health terms, that £80 million will amount to the equivalent of about 8,000 hip replacements, which is what we have forsworn as a result of the new management.

The opting-out system should stop. The second wave of opting-out hospitals should not go ahead until the Select Committee on Health has taken a further look at the business plans. I know that the Select Committee has already done much work on the subject, and I pay tribute to its Chairman, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) who is in the Chamber. The Select Committee is currently considering the business plans, and a report from the Select Committee should be discussed on the Floor of the House before we go another step further.

When the Secretary of State talks about general practitioner budget holding, I notice a curious irony. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) criticised the two tiers developing in the GP budget-holding system, because he said that those doctors with budgets would have a better chance of ensuring that their patients were treated where and how they wanted. I am not sure whether that criticism of the system will be the most telling one.

The political problem with budget holding is that it will prove to be, as it has already been, popular with GPs because of the clinical control that it gives them and, if the name of the game in the new system is that managers with contracts make the decisions, it means that GPs can exercise more medical freedom. As the costs and the squeeze are placed on the free-standing budget holders, Health Ministers will have to go along with the decisions made by the budget holders, because they will not want to undermine management figures who want to control the clinical decision making. That will be the political hot potato with GP budget holders.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Another scenario has proved to be an increasing problem in the north-west: GPs who are not budget holders are excluded from services in their own districts. In my district, the mammograph service was paid for through public funds—£80,000 was raised by a charity. Some GPs who asked women to have a mammograph found that those women were excluded by the district health authority, which had sold its spare capacity of the publicly funded service to other health authorities at a substantially increased cost to gain income for the contract service. The GPs knew about that only when referrals were sent back by the relevant consultants stating that they could not see the women to give them a mammograph.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with a level of knowledge on the matter which I cannot equal. He made his point extremely well. If that is the extent to which professionals in the health service are operating in the dark, it further underlines the anxiety expressed by Opposition Members.

I now turn to the subject of funding—or, as many Opposition Members continue to argue, "underfunding" —in the health service. Earlier, I became confused as to whether we were discussing matters in relation to the financial or the calendar year. In the current year, there is a significant percentage increase in funding. However, this is likely to be an election year, and the projection beyond this year is that the level of increase will dip sharply.

There is a strong case for saying that, in the longer term, the NHS should have more security of funding and should probably enjoy a Government commitment of real annual

[Mr. Kennedy]

growth of 2 per cent. above the inflation rate. I do not think that the spending cycle, in which funding tends to go up as we near polling day and then down as we move further away from an election, promotes stability in either the structure or delivery of services.

The hon. Member for Livingston rightly referred to statistics and information made available to a number of us yesterday and today on what was happening at exactly this moment—5.30 pm—in King's College hospital yesterday. He referred to a couple of examples, and I shall use another one. The individuals brought into that hospital for emergency treatment included: a man aged 80 with chronic obstructive airway disease, who spent five hours on a hospital trolley; a man aged 79 with congested cardiac failure, who spent six hours on a hospital trolley; and a lady, to whom the hon. Member for Livingston referred, who was aged 89 and was both deaf and blind, and spent nine hours on a hospital trolley waiting for treatment. We cannot be sanguine about the state of our national health service when faced with such facts about humans waiting for treatment in this city only 24 hours ago.

I find it unbelievable that one Conservative Member who, characteristically, is no longer present, said that there was no patient with a complaint about hospital treatment anywhere in the country. That hon. Member should talk to any one of the three individuals of which I spoke, or to thousands more like them up and down the land, because he would then realise that they would have no confidence in this Government's handling of the national health service. That verdict will come through clearly on Thursday in Wales and, with even greater resonance, across Scotland, England and Wales, at the next general election.

5.36 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I do not think that I would wish the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) to be silent on the problems of the health service, but we would all find it much more interesting if he would come off the fence and give some idea of what the Liberal Democrats intend to do about health matters. Their amendment is pathetic. Many of us would listen to the hon. Member, perhaps not with fervent interest, but with mild interest, if we had some clue what his party thinks should be done, but instead of giving us that information he simply cites cases where something obviously needs to be done.

The very fact that we are debating this ill-informed motion today shows the Labour party's total lack of understanding of the health service and its needs. The Labour party believes that reform is unnecessary, even when we are faced with massive evidence of the crying need for reform. The Labour party wants the health service left as it is. Labour's only answer to deficiencies in the health service, which we are trying to remedy, is that everything will be all right so long as we double, treble, quadruple or multiply by the number we first thought of, the money that we spend on the health service. The Labour party approaches every problem with a closed mind and an open cheque book—albeit with a cheque that is post-dated and likely to bounce. Labour's attitude towards problems is always to throw money at them unceasingly in the hope that they will be sorted out.

The other night, I had a dream. As is the way with dreams, I was transported, without realising how, to Walworth road. I could hear the banging of hammers and the sawing of wood and I saw that a great arch was being put up over the door of the Labour party headquarters. The words of the motto that the workmen were putting up were, "There is no difficulty that money will not solve—promise any amount." Of course, that is a splendid motto for catching the unwary voter.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Go back to sleep.

Dame Jill Knight: The hon. Lady will be sorry that I am awake.

The beauty of that motto is that the money is not Labour party money, and the beast of the motto is that the theory is a monumental mistake.

There are four excellent reasons why reforms are essential. The first reason is the enormous variations in standards of patient care that exist in the health service. The Labour party has the cheek to talk about a two-tier service developing under the reforms when five minutes research would show that there have been many tiers in the quality of service. The major reason for our reforms was to ensure that all patients, everywhere, receive the same excellent care. The Labour party either does not know or does not bother about a patient being six times more likely to get care in one area than in another, or about someone being three times more likely to get a hip operation if he lives in the south than if he lives on Merseyside. If I represented Merseyside I should be worried about that, but the Labour party does not seem to care.

Some orthopaedic surgeons in the NHS do more operations in a month than others do in six months. Some ear, nose and throat surgeons do 10 operations while others do only one. That cannot be right. Some general practitioners give a far better service than others although they have exactly the same case load—the same number of patients, the same number of the chronically sick, of elderly people, of young people, and so on. There are enormous variations in standards of care. There was always an uneasy feeling that that was the case, and we had studies done that proved it. But the Labour party does not want to know about that. Instead, it has the brass neck to claim that our reforms will bring about precisely what they will remedy. The Labour party could not recognise unfair differences when it saw them, and now it does not recognise effective reforms when they are in front of its nose.

Inefficiency in the running of the health service is a major reason why some patients are denied the treatment that they need. It is no good saying that we should throw more handfuls of money at the problem. We must realise that inefficiency is one of the greatest enemies of patient care in the health service.

The national health service was set up more than 40 years ago for patients who could not get the operations, drugs and other treatment that patients get today, many of which had not even been invented. Modern medicine, like modern business practice, has advanced out of all recognition since 1948. Last week I went into my bank to find that it has reorganised the way one is served, the way one has to wait and the way chequebooks are sent. If it is

essential to bring the high street banks up to date, how much more essential it is to bring up to date and make more efficient the biggest business in Europe.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): A £30 billion operation.

Dame Jill Knight: Exactly so.

The second reason for the reforms is the need for more up-to-date management. Some of the most impressive preparation for the reforms has been made by the National Audit Office, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the enormous amount of work that it has done in a short time on costings, utilisation, property and services. It has used its expertise to provide many examples of improvements that could be made and of money which could be obtained for patient care if only we dragged the whole system kicking and screaming into the second part of the 20th century.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I am trying to be quick. Other hon. Members wish to speak.

The National Audit Office said that efficient use of operating theatres was the key to reducing waiting lists. It said not that more money should be thrown at the problem, but that operating theatres should be managed more efficiently. Day-care surgery, the use of computers, and proper reviews and checks on wating lists were also identified as important. It amazes me that the Labour party seems to have no conception of the message sent out loud and clear by the National Audit Office—that the reforms are essential. The enormous imortance of efficient management has nothing to do with simply allocating more money.

The third reason for the reforms has to do with money—with the need to direct funds better and reduce waste.

Mr. McCartney *rose*——

Dame Jill Knight: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. McCartney: Give way.

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Dame Jill Knight: The National Audit Office has said that at least 10 per cent. of the land and property owned by the health service was surplus to any possible requirements and that £300 million per year could be saved in that area.

The provision of sterile products and services in hospitals—packs and so on—is not well controlled, according to the National Audit Office, and could be carried out more reasonably and cheaply, resulting in savings. Better use could also be made of energy in the health service. The Government's reforms will cover that aspect, too. The National Audit Office also explained how £100 million per year could be saved by the more efficient use of operating theatres.

What about drugs? Everybody knows that a huge proportion of health service funds is spent on drugs. How much of that is wasted? In Yorkshire there was a campaign to call in medicines not being used. In three weeks 2·5 tonnes were handed in. What a waste of money. It was reported that in Oxfordshire when the relatives of someone who had died cleared out the house they found 4,112 Valium and 807 Mogadon tablets—somebody actually bothered to count them. No doubt the National Audit Office could tell us in a flash how much that cost the health service, but my complaint is that money was wasted which could have been spent on patients. The Government's reforms will ensure that the money is spent on them.

The Labour party merely says that more money should be spent on the health service, regardless of the fact that, as has been amply illustrated today, the Labour Government cut funding, whereas we are vastly increasing it. The Labour party does not have a leg to stand on. Our tactic is to spend as much money as the country can afford while ensuring that every pound and every penny is wisely spent and not wasted. All the savings will go straight back into patient care.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: I have not the slightest intention of giving way. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) can save his time and his voice—and mine, too.

Mr. McCartney: Start talking some sense, then.

Dame Jill Knight: Every word that I am saying is true, provable and relevant to the debate. I shall not take lessons from the hon. Gentleman, who has not been in the House for more than five minutes—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) must not seek to intervene from a sedentary position.

Mr. McCartney: I was standing up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dame Jill Knight: The Labour party never says a word about ending waste—it merely castigates us when we try to do so.

The fourth and final reason for the reforms is the need to shift decision-making closer to those who best know their own situation. In campaigning to prevent hospitals from managing their own affairs, and GPs from deciding on their own expenditure, the Labour party is saying that hospital boards are not capable of making their own decisions, and that GPs are not intelligent enough to manage their own budgets. Labour can go to the country on that sort of cry if it likes, but it will not hold up. Local hospitals are far more capable of managing their own affairs.

Time and again in my political and private life, in local Government and in the House, I have seen examples which prove that those closest to the centre of any organisation are infinitely better at deciding how money should be spent and what decisions should be made in that organisation. Labour denies that, and that has something to do with its fixation that the man in Whitehall knows best and that nobody has enough sense to manage their own affairs. Perhaps Labour also clings to the belief that everything and everyone—doctors, hospitals, schools, businesses or people—should always be subject to outside control.

We forgive Labour its fixation and its outmoded beliefs, but we cannot forgive its deliberate misrepresentation that trust hospitals are opting out of the national health service. The Opposition know that that is untrue, but they keep trying to perpetuate the lie. The fact that they do not perpetuate it in today's motion is no reason for not pouring scorn and condemnation on it, as I certainly do, and no reason not to vote against it with derision.

5.50 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I should like to make two brief points. First, on Thursday at Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister spent much time quoting with approbation the words of Dr. Ken Grant about the national health service reforms. Judging by the resounding cheers from Tory Back Benchers, Dr. Grant could be the wisest guru on medical matters who has ever been born. I know rather more about Dr. Ken Grant than the Prime Minister and all the Tory Back Benchers put together. Dr. Grant might even be a friend of mine.

I was particularly surprised to hear the Prime Minister say that Dr. Grant had said that setting up an NHS trust was opting out of bureaucracy because Dr. Grant is probably the last person on earth to make such a remark. My friend Ken Grant is not a practising GP; nor does he work in a hospital as a doctor. He is a wheeling-dealing, fixing bureaucrat who, over the past three or four years has created, ordered, arranged, set up and established all the bureaucracy in the City and Hackney district health authority. All its successes are down to him, and all his criticisms, which the Prime Minister quoted so eagerly, are an indictment of himself.

What does my friend Ken intend to do now? He plans to leave the district health authority to set up a new bureaucracy, so that we shall have two bureaucracies instead of one. We shall have the district health authority and the hospital trust, which in this case will run not one hospital but several, and all the facilities of the district health authority. The Prime Minister says that that is good, but I remind the House that the last time the Conservatives reorganised the national health service, it led to an enormous increase in the number of bureaucrats. It is a racing certainty that this reorganisation of the health service will lead to bureaucrats multiplying like loaves and fishes in Judaea. We shall have more bureaucrats and fewer doctors and nurses.

About two weeks ago, I was drinking champagne in the great hall of Gray's Inn in celebration of the fact that my former pupil, Helena Kennedy, had become a QC. Over the champagne, I had an argument with Ken Grant about the NHS reforms. I put my arm around his shoulder and said, "Tell me, Ken, what is it in this life that you really believe in?" He said, "They keep changing the ground rules and that makes it difficult for me. I spend too much of my time emptying beds and closing wards to reduce our deficit." I said, "Why don't you fight for what you think is right?" He gave me a quizzical look, as if to say, "Only a politician would be stupid enough to make a suggestion like that."

When Ken dies, he will almost certainly go to hell, but, quite undeterred, he will immediately set up a consortium of the helpless, the hopeless and the hapless—as he has done with this national health service trust application—and he will start negotiating with the devil. I say to him, "Ken, don't do it. Why sup with the devil on that side of the House when you can walk with God on this side?"

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) spoke about a dream. My second point is about the shattering of a 17-year-old dream about the building of a new district health authority hospital in Hackney. That dream started under the last Labour Government and a few years ago, half of that hospital at Homerton was built. But half a hospital is not enough, and it looks a bit odd. Just a year ago, the regional health authority said that we could have the other half because it had the funds and the date, and the Government had cleared the scheme. Four weeks ago, the regional health authority, backed by the Government, said that phase 2 of the Homerton hospital will not be built—today, tomorrow or ever.

We went to see a Minister about the hospital. He gave us lots of sympathy and a cup of coffee, but insisted that the money for phase 2 was not available. The mind-boggling reason given to us for not building phase 2 of a hospital first thought about 17 years ago was that the property market was such that funds would never be available.

On Thursday, the Prime Minister said that the NHS would deal with its problems on the basis of clinical need. There is much discussion about who has or has not O-levels and about who is or is not educated. It is preposterous to suggest that clinical need has something to do with the current state of the property market. Clinical need has no more to do with that than it has to do with the position of Jupiter or with the fact that the remains of the mad axeman are embedded in the concrete of the M4. That is an absurd reason for not building the second half of a hospital.

We have decided to put up a plaque on our half-hospital, giving the names of the five guilty people. They are William Waldegrave, Tory; Tim Chessels, chairman, regional health authority, Tory; Virginia Bottomley, Tory; Evan Stone, chairman, district health authority, Tory; and Stephen Dorrell, Tory. That should explain why we shall be voting against the Government.

5.57 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) spoke about Dr. Ken Grant supping with the devil, and suggested that he should instead sup with God. Dr. Grant has supped with the select, in so far as he has been a distinguished adviser to the Select Committee on Social Services, the predecessor of the Select Committee on Health. As a specialist adviser, Dr. Grant contributed to a report by the Select Committee on Social Services and, in general, that report was warmly welcomed by the Opposition. Perhaps Dr. Grant has rather more ability and talent than the hon. Gentleman gave him credit for. Many of us who worked closely with Dr. Grant for a long time know that he is a distinguished and qualified community physician. He has the qualifications and the necessary skill to do the job that he is currently undertaking.

Mr. McCartney: I agree that Dr. Grant advised the Select Committee, but the hon. Gentleman should remind the House why the Opposition welcomed the Committee's report. It was because it recommended that the Government should not go ahead with trust opt-out hospitals until a pilot scheme had been conducted. The Government rejected Dr. Grant's advice, although it was accepted by the Select Committee.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding the House of some of the conclusions and recommendations set out in the Select Committee's report, which I stand by to this day.

Today, the members of the Select Committee on Health visited the Bessborough clinic in the Riverside health

authority here in Westminster. We also visited the West London hospital and the Queen Charlotte maternity hospital. It is important to say from the Government side of the House that there is concern among those working in the health service and those who come to it for treatment about the Government's reforms. Most of those we met today—managers, midwives, nurses, doctors and consultants—accept that the reforms are with us and that we must make them work.

I give my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State due credit for saying that, if some adjustment needs to take place or some amendment needs to be made to the reforms, he will ensure that it takes place. I know from my experience in dealing with trust applications that, if there is concern about whether applications should be put back for further consideration, my right hon. Friend is prepared to take that course so that the concern that is felt in an area in which applications are being submitted can be reconsidered and examined in the calm light of day.

It is important that the House should know that the Select Committee on Health—we have had full co-operation from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—will take evidence on the morning of Wednesday 22 May from Guy's and Lewisham health service trust and from the Bradford health service trust. The chief executive and the chairman of Guy's and Lewisham will give evidence. On behalf of the Bradford trust, the vice-chairman and the chief executive will give evidence.

We have already received from the Bradford trust its corporate plan and all the information we require to enable us to ask relevant and constructive questions when the vice-chairman and the chief executive come before us. I am confident that, in the near future, we shall receive a draft business and corporate plan from Guy's and Lewisham, and all the other evidence that we require, so that the Select Committee, a Committee acting on behalf of the House, can seek to clarify what has happened in the two trust areas and their hospitals, what their plans are for the future and why there have been announcements of substantial job loses. I hope that we shall be able to ascertain where the job losses are likely to fall.

There is concern in the country about trust status, but it is sensible to realise that the reforms are with us and that the trust hospitals have not opted out of the national health service. Indeed, the hospitals are still very much within it.

Only yesterday, I was asked as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health to open a new home for Anchor Housing in Gorton, Manchester. It is a sheltered accommodation project, with nursing care, that is a joint venture between the Anchor housing association and the Central Manchester health authority. I know from what the chairman of the health authority has told me that it is making it clear to the trust hospitals within central Manchester that it does not wish to see—this is the chairman's view—the development of a two-tier health service.

The initial stages of the reforms could well produce a two-tier health service. We know that from the information that has already come to us from general practitioner fund holders. It is clear that they will exercise their financial weight and influence in getting the best possible deal and contract with a hospital, and the consultants in that hospital. In guaranteeing certain time scales for the treatment of patients, it is clear that patients from non-fund-holding general practitioners are likely to be passed over.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to give an assurance that he will not tolerate a two-tier health service, and that he will give the most powerful and influential guidance from the Department to the national health service executive, under the chief executive, Duncan Nichol, who will transfer the guidance to the regional health authorities, district health authorities and health service trusts. It must be made clear that they must not permit a two-tier system. In any guaranteeing of the terms of a contract, they must accept their other responsibilities as national health service hospitals. That will go a long way to giving reassurance to those who are concerned about trusts and GP fund holders.

The initial implementation of the reforms will see the choice of where to refer patients being exercised powerfully by general practitioner fund holders. I think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is aware of that. To build on my previous remarks, non-fund-holding general practitioners will have their choice of where to refer patients limited by the block contract system.

It is theoretically possible for non-fund-holding GPs to make what are known as extra-contractual referrals to provider units where the patients' district health authority has not agreed a contract, but I believe that that will be limited by the residual funds that have been set aside by a purchasing district health authority that are not already committed to contract. I remind the House that residual funding has to cover any extra-contractual referrals by non-fund-holding GPs and the cost of tertiary referrals, as well as any liabilities arising out of the admission of a district patient to an accident and emergency department in other districts or regions.

In the short term, it is clear that a two-tier system may be in operation where one set of patients—those registered with the fund-holding GP practice—are advantaged in terms of choice over patients who are registered with non-fund-holding practices. The choice of referral will be further restricted where district health authorities have not set aside sufficient residual funds to pay for extra-contractual referrals.

I shall quote Marianne Rigge, the director of the College of Health, who wrote to the Select Committee on Health to say:

"most GPs and their patients are going to have less choice than in the past."

I believe that that will be only in the short term. Marianne Rigge continues:

"No longer will it be a purely clinical decision by a consultant to whom a GP has referred a patient, that he will do that operation. There will be a new dimension—that of payment. The reasons behind the decision to operate may become financial rather than clinical. Patients may find themselves being put into a new sort of waiting list—for the money, rather than for the treatment."

District health authorities that have general practitioner fund holders in their district may set priorities—this is important, and it has not been mentioned so far—that are different from those of general practitioners. That may cause problems, and no formal structure has been instituted to resolve them. The only mechanism for reconciliation is informal negotiation.

As my ministerial colleagues are aware, DHAs have little power to control general practitioner referring.

[Mr. Winterton]

Potential financial problems will be created if insufficient reserves are kept by a DHA to fund the extra referrals which I have already mentioned. The Department of Health predicted that most general practitioner fund holders would agree block contracts based on previous years' referral patterns.

That has not always happened. Some fund holders are keen to change their referral patterns this year; that means that they are seeking what I can only describe as "better deals" for their patients now, and are prepared to use their budget-holding powers to buy services from hospitals that can offer shorter waiting times, less extensive care or better-quality treatment—or a combination of all three.

According to *Health Service Journal*, Oxford health authority asked its GP fund holders to tie up 80 per cent. of their budgets in hospital contracts, leaving themselves 20 per cent. "to play the market". But let me present the other side of the coin: all is not necessarily rosy for fund holders. We have already received evidence that some of them are complaining that their budgets are too small to give them any clout with potential advisers. To get around that problem, some GPs are considering forming fund-holding consortia, in the hope that that will increase their purchasing power.

Let me add another caveat. If a GP spends his or her budget before the end of a financial year, the GP will play the role of "rationer of health care", and may well create a waiting list all of his—or her—own.

The implementation of the new reforms will cause problems, but, as I said at the beginning of my speech, these reforms are already with us. We on the Select Committee consider it our duty to ensure that they work, and also to ensure—with the help of the NHS professions and the Department of Health—that the Government's objectives are achieved. I entirely share those objectives, which are to provide better value for money in the delivery of health care, to make the system more patient-responsive and to ensure that a larger percentage of the total budget is spent directly on patient care and the delivery of treatment.

I believe that I speak on behalf of many other people when I suggest to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that we should accept, for the moment at least, that the NHS reforms are with us. Would it not have been better for us to discuss today how those reforms could be improved to the benefit of the people, rather than merely bandying statistics and throwing political vitriol across the Floor? I personally believe that the Government are entirely sincere in their wish to achieve their laudable objectives—which, I suspect, are shared by every hon. Member, whatever his party.

Having said that, let me again ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for an assurance that he will do his utmost—by means of firm guidance and encouragement from the top—to make it clear that the Government have no intention of establishing a two-tier health service. Already, the lead has been taken by a number of trust and district health authority chairmen, although not, as yet, by any regional health authority chairmen. If my right hon. Friend follows up that lead, he will carry people along with the reforms—which, after all, are already being implemented.

I am convinced that, if my right hon. Friend takes that course, we shall be able to remove the NHS from the political arena—where, today, it has been the subject of such a negative and sterile debate.

6.13 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Listening to today's debate, I sometimes wondered whether I was at the London Palladium. From what the Government have said, it might be imagined that there was nothing wrong with the health service. Those of us who represent constituencies that have suffered from the lack of Government expenditure know otherwise. For four years, I have been following up my ten-minute Bill asking the Government to show compassion for the thousands of women who die of cervical cancer each year. It would cost only £15 million, but the Government—to a man and to a woman—voted against my Bill. That is the kind of Government we are dealing with.

The politicians' graveyard on the Conservative Benches evokes no sympathy in me. These will soon be yesterday's men and women. For 12 years, the electorate have given them their chance, and what have they done? They introduced the poll tax, which they have now been forced to abandon. Now they have a new philosophy—health service trusts. Why do they not do something about the people who are handing out private insurance, telling the purchasers that if they take a health service bed instead of one in the private sector they will receive £100 a day? Has any Conservative Member received £100 a day from private health insurance? I think so; I know people who have received that kind of money.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) has raised with the Department of Health the plight of those who, through no fault of their own, were injected with HIV. They asked, through their lawyers, whether they would be given compensation. My hon. Friend wrote to the Secretary of State on 28 February, but he has still received no reply. That is the sort of compassion that the Department is showing.

The Government say that there is nothing wrong with the health service, and that they believe that a two-tier system will work. If there is nothing wrong with the health service, why is there a waiting list of 70,000 in Scotland, and waiting lists of 50,000 and 800,000 in Wales and England respectively? Do the Government honestly think that the people will accept the closure of new hospitals because of the lack of staff and equipment?

The Government will find the answers in the ballot box. They believe in the ballot box for trade unions; they do not believe in a health service ballot box. When Guy's hospital —the Government's flagship—became a trust, was there any consultation with the workers? It is certainly clear that the Prime Minister's office is not briefing him properly. When the first Scottish hospital asked for advice about trust status, the consultants opposed the move by 87 votes to two. The Government may believe that the men and women of England and Scotland who work for the health service are ready to sell it out, but they will receive a different answer at the next general election.

I find it hard to believe that a trust set up to show the way in Britain should forecast, in its business plan, a profit of £1·5 million, and finish its first year with a deficit of £7·5 million. Who will help it out? Certainly not the present Government.

When asked about the prospect of 600 people at Guy's hospital being put on the dole, the Secretary of State said, "It is not our business; it is the board's business." I believe that, when both Scottish and English Ministers said at the Perth conference that they would not take hospitals out of the NHS, they meant it. Because of the way in which they have set up this project, the system is isolated and fragmented and ready for privatisation. That is their idea and that is what the trusts are all about—the Americanisation and privatisation of the health service. "Don't trust the trusts," is the slogan, and do not trust the Tories either.

There certainly has not been any consultation in Scotland, and if the people who asked for consultation had got it, they certainly would have said a big no to the trusts. It is nonsense to say that the people of Scotland want funded practices. Out of 1,000 practitioners, only 46 applied for advice on funded practices and only four are thinking the matter over. Nobody in the health service wants funded practices. They want decent hospitals, beds and more money invested in the service.

The health boards have done a great job for the Government, especially Lothian health board, which has already drawn up secret plans. If the health boards are really interested in dealing with the shortage of beds, why are they recommending the closure of Edinburgh Royal with 2,000 beds, one of Scotland's largest teaching hospitals, and replacing it with a new hospital with 700 fewer beds? That is the type of thing they propose. It is all about selling off assets. There will be a carrot in the form of the hospitals' assets—the beautiful buildings and greenery and the acres of land that are prime sites for building.

I hope that the people of Lothian are aware of Lothian health board's plans to close part of Eastern general hospital and of its plans for Roodlands general hospital, the Simpson memorial maternity pavilion and the Princess Alexandra eye pavilion. No doubt, the hon. Members representing constituents in that area will have something to say about it.

I shall not take up any more time, Mr. Speaker, as many hon. Members have been sitting here for hours hoping to catch your eye. I shall simply say that the people of the United Kingdom and Scotland are not interested in trusts or funded practices.

6.23 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I have heard from hon. Members several instances of the national health service seeming to have failed the patient. Last night, I was out with one of my constituents, when he collapsed. He was taken to St. Thomas's where he received first-class treatment. He could not have praised more highly the efforts of the people who serve the hospital. I have heard too much from the Opposition this evening about how incompetent and inefficient some of our hospitals are. I disagree profoundly with that.

The national health service became operational on 5 July 1948. Let me put that date into perspective. Electricity generation was the task of the British Electricity Authority, the forerunner of the now defunct Central Electricity Generating Board. British Rail, established only a year earlier, was investigating technologies to replace the steam locomotive. The National Liberal party, at its June conference in 1948, voted to change its name —surprise, surprise.

The electricity industry has now been privatised. BR, which has run out of steam, is currently in the process of restructuring its organisation. The time has surely now come for the NHS to realign itself to face the challenges of the 1990s, not those of the 1940s. Demographic changes, new social aspirations and advances in medical science have all contributed to the need for a new service culture.

The Opposition, however, are happy, as we all know, to keep the NHS in a time warp. Their Front Benchers pour scorn on the Government's reforms; to a man and a woman, they fail to grasp that the NHS is in desperate need of an overhaul. All they can talk about is how much more money they would spend—a cheap commentary, without any economic foundation whatsoever.

The Opposition's shallow grasp of health economics was revealed last year, when the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) committed the Labour party to spending some £3 billion over the lifetime of a Government to restore what he called "NHS underfunding". He failed to realise that the Government have increased spending by more than £6 billion over the last two years alone. More impressively, during their first 11 years in office, this Government increased spending by 52 per cent. There are 30,000 more patients treated every week, 16,000 more GPs, 5,000 more in the hospital service, and 60,000 more nurses and midwives.

In addition to channelling unprecedented sums into the NHS, my right hon. Friend and his ministerial team have wrestled successfully with the institutional problems that have long plagued the health service. The NHS has become what one might call a bureaucratic ghetto, with over 1 million employees, the largest employer in Europe.

The NHS trust hospitals form the vanguard of the Government's latest reforms. On 1 April, 57 were created, and 130 others hope to join them by next year. They have an ongoing restructural process which will drag the national health service into the 21st century. Hospitals are now able to release themselves from the pervasive bureaucracy that has stifled local initiative for so long—a malaise which is particularly relevant to the North-West Thames regional health authority, which administers the funding of hospitals in my constituency.

My local authority, East Hertfordshire, has been the victim of gross mismanagement dished out by the North-West Thames regional health authority. The six shire authorities have had to stand by and witness their prudent fiscal policies being translated into cuts, while funds have been redirected into free-spending inner-London health authorities. The results are absurd. The shire authorities, which have 43 per cent. of the region's population, receive only 31 per cent. of the cash. In other words, where £1 is spent in Brent, only 75p is spent in Welwyn Hatfield.

A comparison of staffing ratios in East Hertfordshire as against the Riverside health authority produces even more laughable results. East Hertfordshire has 19 occupational therapists compared with Riverside's 120; a derisory 18 physiotherapists compared to inner London's 119; and 17 district nurses compared to 179—and this is for the same number of people in Riverside as in East Hertfordshire.

The most graphic example of this towering ineptitude is seen in the history of the Westminster and Chelsea hospital project. The cost of that scheme started off at £78 million.

[Mr. David Evans]

It then went up to £130 million. It is now over £200 million, and every capital project in the shire district has had to be shelved for three years. That is due to the incompetence of the North West Thames regional health authority and its chairman. Hospital trusts will offer an escape from that quagmire. They are an imaginative, far-sighted response to the archaic thinking prevalent in the old organisational structure.

I come now to the caring Labour party and an article in *The Times* in 1978 with the headline "Hospital is to turn away patients with cancer". It says:

"'Patients with breast, lung and other cancers and abortion cases are to be turned away from the Kingston hospital, Surrey, because of industrial action by national health services workers and supervisors', the hospital said yesterday. From midnight next Tuesday even known cancer cases will be denied admission and lives immediately threatened. Investigative surgery, even where there is strong suspicion of the life-threatening condition, will not take place."

On 21 October 1978, *The Times* said:

"Talks aimed at ending the dispute involving hospital engineers and work supervisors broke down last night after union leaders rejected an appeal from Mr. David Ennals, Secretary of State for Social Services, for a return to work, because, he said, patients were dying Mr. Ennals, who had been touring the West Norwich hospital where services had been badly affected by the dispute said: 'I appeal to those who are taking industrial action. For God's sake suspend it. For God's sake go back to work and stop playing around with people's lives. They can no longer take it out on patients. There is no doubt that some people have already died. Every day and week that goes by, the danger is there.'"

Far from the medical garden of Eden, hon. Members will see an institution ravaged by union militancy and retarded by poor leadership mirrored in the Labour party. If the Labour party gets in at the next general election, God help us.

6.31 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I must of necessity compress my remarks, but I have a local issue that I wish to raise.

My constituency is also covered by what is known as West unit within the Grampian health board. West unit has recently applied for additional information on trust status. During the past few weeks, many of my constituents—not only those who work in the health service—have made clear their genuine concerns and fears about the situation.

I start from the basic principle that the NHS is not a business to be organised by managers. People are at the heart of the service. We are the providers of the health service and we must understand the profound affection that people throughout the country have for it. Some of my constituents' concerns are based on the Government's record in the preparation for the changes to the NHS.

I refer in particular to what was said not by the Secretary of State's predecessor but by his predecessor's predecessor—the golden boy of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore)—who was charged with bringing forward fund-holding practices and trust status. In an address to the Young Conservatives, he said:

"I foresee a substantial increase in private medical care with the NHS remaining as a safety net."

Against that kind of background, is it any surprise to the Government that people should be suspicious? Why should any Minister refer to the NHS as a safety net unless the Government intend to implement a two-tier system?

The Government were asked by the royal colleges, the British Medical Association and the Select Committee to implement pilot schemes. Instead, 57 trusts were established and it is already clear from their record that not all is well. We have seen what has happened in three of them and we are deeply concerned that the Government are continuing to push trust status against that background. At the very least, they should consider abandoning the prospect of further trusts until we can analyse and evaluate further what is happening in those already established.

My constituents are also worried about what is meant by the consultation process. In theory, there is consultation before trust status is agreed to, but it is essentially a meaningless exercise because, even where the medical profession and the public have made clear their antagonism towards the idea of a trust, it has still gone ahead.

Those who are charged with delivering the health service—in our area, the Grampian health board—say that they are required to take a view on any trust application and are well placed to advise on the likely impact of the proposal on the local provision and the quality of health care. Those people are not from the medical profession—they are business men and Tory appointees. In addition, within the Grampian health board area, the health councils have been reduced from five to one. In my constituency, the most northerly part of the Grampian region, we have only three representatives on the health council. Democracy appears to have gone out of the window.

Against that background, given the exigencies of time, I make a plea to the Government to endorse the view being so clearly expressed everywhere that there must be no further trusts until there has been a clear evaluation and analysis of the existing ones.

6.36 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Tonight the Secretary of State stood before the House of Commons as a man in whom the public have not a shred of confidence. No one believes the Government's promises on the NHS any more. No one trusts the Government because they have broken every promise that has been wrung from them. Above all, they have broken their promise that we can keep our national health service. Instead, we have seen hospitals opting out, NHS queue-jumping and a relentless drive towards a United States-style, two-tier health service.

No one believes the Government's promise that they are really committed to the NHS, and why should we? We were told that the opted-out hospitals were to give people a say at local level, to devolve decision-making down to local communities, but then we learned that there were to be no ballots, so people at local level were not to have a say about whether their hospital should opt out. Despite the overwhelming opposition of people at local level, the Government were clearly determined to ride roughshod over local opinion. How can that be giving people a say at local level when they cannot even have a say in whether their hospital should opt out?

We were told that opting out would not mean job losses and all that we said was supposedly scaremongering. The gap between rhetoric and reality is well illustrated in a little booklet entitled "Guy's Hospital Gazette", which says:

"We are friendly and fun. This is a great place to work . . . The management cares, really cares about people . . . Having fun is considered as legitimate!"

That is the Guy's self-governing trust. Just as that document was being circulated to the staff, we were told that 600 jobs were to go. We were then told that those job losses would not hit services, but then a leaked memorandum from Guy's hospital told us that there would be

"inevitable reductions in direct patient care services."

So the job losses that we were told would not happen will indeed hit patient care services, although the Government tried to conceal the truth from the people who depend on those services.

We were told that opted-out hospitals would not be cut loose from the national health service, but as the scale of the cuts became clear at Guy's and then in Bradford, the Secretary of State said, "It's nothing to do with me—I am only the Secretary of State. Guy's has opted out, as has Bradford, so why don't you ask the chief executives of opted-out hospitals?" The Secretary of State has a choice: he can either accept responsibility for cuts in services or he can admit that hospitals have opted out of the NHS. He cannot have it both ways.

We were told that opted-out hospitals would still be open and accountable, but in the 200-page application for Guy's opt-out nothing was said about the swingeing and immediate cuts in jobs and services. We have never been allowed to see the secret business plan that the trust submitted to the Government. Why should we trust the Government when they will not show us documents that trusts have submitted to them? The Government are supposed to be running the national health service, but they are operating it like the secret service.

The Government denied that the internal market would produce a two-tier national health service——

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): As regards the two-tier service, does my hon. Friend share my deep concern about the report to the Oxfordshire community health council this week to the effect that a contract is being concluded with Swindon district health authority giving patients from that authority a guarantee of a scan on the marvellous magnetic resonance imager at the John Radcliffe hospital within two weeks, when the average waiting time for Oxfordshire patients is three months? Does that not show that it is the ability to fix financial deals and not medical need which determines access to treatment?

Ms. Harman: Moreover, because all those people will have priority in queue-jumping, everyone else will have to wait even longer. Within weeks of the establishment of an internal market, queue-jumping has been institutionalised in the NHS, and the Secretary of State knows it. It happened first in Watford. Let us be absolutely clear what we are talking about. Two GP fund-holding practices have 10 per cent. of the patients in the district and 90 per cent. are with other GPs. As a result of priority admission being arranged for the patients of the two fund-holding practices, the other 90 per cent. of patients will have to wait longer.

The same arrangement was made in Bart's, and now an arrangement is being negotiated with Guy's whereby not only will some GP patients have priority admission, and therefore everyone else will have to wait longer, but some people will get priority when it comes to who performs the operation and whom they see. Advantage will be negotiated. Some patients will see consultants and senior registrars and everyone else will be relegated, irrespective of clinical need to more junior members of staff. That is the logic of the internal market, and it will hit not only Watford, Bart's and Guy's, but all hospitals in due course.

When a person is treated will depend not on how urgent the clinical condition is, but on whether the GP is a budget-holder and whether the district health authority has been able to fix a preferential deal. As a result, there will be patients in adjacent beds for hip operations, one having waited 18 months in pain and agony and the other having waited only two weeks. I shall be interested to know whether Conservative Members would defend that situation. If that is not a two-tier health service, I do not know what is.

Inconsistencies have started to appear in the stories from different members of the Government, as always happens with people who are up to no good. The Prime Minister is saying quite clearly:

"Operations are done on the basis of clinical need"

and again:

"I shall repeat that in case he did not fully hear it first time: operations are done on the basis of clinical need."—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 620.]

Yet the Secretary of State has admitted tonight that queue-jumping arrangements will be negotiated, so it will be contracts and wheeling and dealing between GP budget-holders, hospitals and district health authorities that will determine priorities rather than clinical need. No wonder, to use the words of Dr. Ken Grant, district general manager of the City and Hackney health authority, in a letter to consultants:

"This does mean that the question of equity has gone out of the window"—

I should like to know whether the Secretary of State accepts that—

"but this is the reality of GPs holding their own practice budgets for elective work."

Another promise that the Government have broken is that people will have a choice about where they go for treatment. Choice is being taken away from the patient in consultation with the GP.

Mr. Hind: They never had it before.

Ms. Harman: Yes, they did—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members will give me one—*[Interruption.]* Take maternity services, where there has been a long tradition——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that it would be better if the hon. Lady directed her speech through me.

Ms. Harman: If we take maternity services, there has been a long tradition, which we should encourage, of women choosing where to have their babies on the basis of what was convenient for them, what sort of care they wanted and the style of delivery that they wanted. That was described as cross-boundary flow and operated under the last Labour Government and until now. However, the decision about which hospital she will go to will not now be taken by a woman in consultation with her GP but by the district health authority manager, who will place block

[Ms. Harman]

bookings for maternity services for the district. If a woman wants to have a baby in a hospital other than the one where the contract has been placed, she will have to apply for access to the extra-contractual referral fund and go through the procedure. There is simply not enough money in the contingency funds to safeguard choice, tertiary referrals, and so forth.

If the Government were honest, they would admit that choice has gone out of the window with the internal market. They also ought to be honest and admit that they are promoting private health care. They have allowed waiting lists to grow so that more and more people have been driven to paying for private health care. The Government have been giving tax relief for private health care for the elderly. Now the private sector is stalking further into the NHS, with private contractors for cleaning and laboratory services and private deals for private hospitals on NHS sites.

Perhaps the Minister in her winding-up speech will take the opportunity to stop in its track the secret deal that AMI Healthcare is negotiating to build a private hospital on the site of the QEII hospital in Welwyn Garden City to lure NHS consultants and nurses away from their patients to do private work and to make everyone else wait longer.

We remain steadfast in our straightforward opposition to the internal market, where doctors have to put cash before care, where profits come before patients. We shall abolish the internal market and we shall remain steadfast in our opposition to opting out. We shall bring opted-out hospitals back within the NHS. The Government can no longer carry on riding roughshod over public opinion. They are wildly out of step with the mood of the public. They must admit—as they did with the poll tax—that they have got it wrong.

6.48 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We are becoming accustomed to a litany of carping hysteria, negative stories and misleading information. I shall focus on some of the elementary points. "Take maternity services," said the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). Well, let us take maternity services. What has happened? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the House that perinatal mortality has never been lower. In the past 10 years, we have halved the number of babies dying in childbirth and in the past 15 years we have halved the number of women dying in childbirth. That is what I call "taking maternity services". More than that, in 10 years we have gained one third more midwives. We are profoundly and sincerely committed to concentrating on the improvement of the identifiable and measurable health care indicators.

As for waiting lists, the last Labour Government, like every Labour Government, left power with waiting lists increased; there was a 48 per cent. increase in waiting lists during their term of office. Waiting lists have come down 7 per cent. under the Conservative Government. We want to do better, and we will do better. If ever there was encouragement for the private sector, it was the fact of the Labour party being in power. As has been said clearly in the debate, the clinical judgment and the priority which operated when the Labour party was in power were exercised by the COHSE official at the gate. We understand that. With one third of the parliamentary Labour party sponsored by one of the health unions, we understand where Labour's loyalties lie.

Our commitment is clear: it is to continue to improve the health care of our people. No, we do not want to argue with the AMI initiative at Welwyn Hatfield. If the private sector can flourish and develop, that does not offend us, because we are concentrating on improving the functioning, the management and the care provided by our national health service.

None of us is prepared to listen to lectures from the Labour party about commitment, investment and plans for the health service because the Government have invested in the service and increased the number of doctors and nurses. I do not know how the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) dared to talk about the record of staff in the face of the cuts in pay that health care staff suffered under Labour.

There has been discussion today about a two-tier service. I want to give an example of what I think would have created a two-tier service. Hon. Members are well advised to recall the debates on the introduction of the general practitioner contract. Almost all now agree that the contract has been a major force for good. Children are immunised and women are screened. It is becoming a health service, not a disease service. There is more health promotion.

What was the line of the Labour party? According to Labour, it was too much to expect GPs in inner-city areas to meet the targets that the rest of the country had to meet. The Labour line was that targest should be lowered in inner-city areas. That is what I call a two-tier health service. Our approach was not to lower the targets for some groups in the community but to make sure that those GPs in inner-city areas received additional deprivation payments. We want to make sure that all parts of the community receive the best possible patient care.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) for his contribution and for his recognition that the health reforms are here to stay. We want to improve the health care of all. Yes, trusts are at the forefront of changes. GP fund holders can use their purchasing power. They have the control and autonomy to do what a good GP has always done, which is to advise patients on how to get the best deal from the various hospitals and provisions. That is the role of the GP. The GP is the advocate for the patient. We want GPs to push forward the frontiers, but we want the districts, which have much greater purchasing muscle than GP fund holders, to make sure that they seek the same quality improvements so that they can get the same results in waiting times.

Again, what is the approach of the Labour party? It is equal misery for all, levelling down, and the lowest common denominator. Labour thinks that it would be wrong for some people to make progress because others might be left out. Our approach is to have the best possible health care for all the people. If trusts can move forward improvements in quality and if GP fund holders can use their leverage to improve health care, we will welcome and endorse that.

I should like to address some of the speeches made in the debate. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) spoke with feeling about BMA opposition to the health service. He quoted it as saying, "We didn't understand what the reality of the service would be." We know how that feels. We are absolutely confident that, as

the reforms bed in and as we move forward, the BMA and many others will understand precisely what they mean for the health service.

The right hon. Gentleman seemed in his splendid oratory, which all of us much enjoyed, to overlook the fact that it was his party that introduced cash limits for the health service. On a precise point, he mentioned the role of physiotherapists. I endorse the point that it is often the professions allied to medicine which can make a major contribution to improving patient care. I can inform the right hon. Gentleman that there has been a 35 per cent. increase in professions allied to medicine over the past 10 years. Certainly physiotherapists have an important part to play.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe), who has particular knowledge of and expertise in the health service. I am grateful for his recognition of what is being done about junior doctors. Much of the work in which I have been involved in that respect has been built on his work in achieving a balance. That was very much the model that was put to me when there was talk about having a ministerially led team to tackle an outdated, unacceptable way of training our juniors. How pleased I am that the consultants and the juniors have found a way through the hurdle. We are setting up regional task forces and guidance will be produced shortly. We are determined to bring to an end an unacceptable way of training doctors.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that the NHS trust within the national health service has the opportunity to reintroduce matrons into hospitals? One hospital has already done that. New managements could make similar decisions. Most people would welcome that approach.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is always worth while giving way to my hon. Friend. He has made a point that meets with great support. Indeed, he has made two important points. First, the culture around the matron was that she was a person who knew what was going on. The matron understood how the hospital was organised. That is part of our emphasis on better management. We have to tackle the problem. We cannot allow the health service to run on in the way that it has worked traditionally. We need people to take responsibility.

Secondly, my hon. Friend was right to identify the role of nurses. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has carried forward the cause of nurses by putting the chief nursing officer on the policy board. We introduced Project 2000, a much more appropriate way of training nurses, who are now much better paid.

Coming back to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth, who spoke about nurse prescribing, we want progress as quickly as possible. It is a dreary feature of Government that we need to make sure that the list and the cost benefit are correct and that liaison with other professionals has been properly addressed.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend make it clear that the problems that we have discussed in the debate relating to London hospitals are essentially London problems? Will she make that clear before the Labour party carries its nasty propaganda to the north of England and frightens many constituents in other parts of the country with its suggestions about NHS trusts?

Mrs. Bottomley: Indeed, my hon. Friend is so right. Of course, the Labour party has total amnesia. Not only did Labour introduce cash limiting on the health service and prescription charges, but it set up the resource allocation working party, identifying then the dilemma which we face about the provision of consultants and beds in inner cities, based on historic provision, at a time when there has been enormous expansion outside London. The reforms will help us better to plan services and to improve the care that we provide.

We have no doubt that these reforms will build a better health service. We have a right to have pride in our record. We have invested in an unprecedented way. We have worked with the service, and for the service, for patients. Above all, putting patients first is the focus of our work. I hope that all hon. Members will reject the Labour party's motion. The Labour party has no right to speak for the health service. Its only loyalty is, of course, to the health service unions. Ours is the record, ours is the policy, and we shall see a stronger, healthier and more effective health service as a result of these reforms.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 296.

Division No. 142] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)

Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jimmy Dunachie and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas

Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the progressive implementation of the Government's reforms of the National Health Service, coupled with substantial increases in resources for the National Health Service and in the numbers of patients treated since 1979; looks forward to the benefits of these reforms being spread more widely so that services everywhere are brought up to the standards of the best, especially with the further development of National Health Service trusts and fundholding practices; notes that district health authorities and general practitioner fundholding practices will both give priority to patient's clinical needs; welcomes the determination of the new National Health Service trusts to get to grips with long-standing management problems; supports the new role of district health authorities as guardians of the public health, accountable for arranging comprehensive care for their local residents; and endorses the Government's intention to set out a new agenda for the National Health Service which concentrates more than ever on improving the health of the people.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, may I say what I said at the beginning of the debate. As many hon. Members wish to participate, I ask not only Members on the Back Benches, but those on the Front Benches, to make short contributions.

7.13 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government's response to crises in Iraq, Bangladesh, and Sub-Saharan Africa has been slow and shamefully inadequate; and calls on the Government immediately to provide additional resources for the Overseas Development Administration to deal with the three current crises and to set a timetable to meet the United Nations aid target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product.

Over the past few weeks, we have heard much talk about aid fatigue and compassion fatigue. Indeed, with the horror of the disasters appearing daily on our television screens and in our newspapers, it is convenient for Governments to run for cover behind those phrases as an excuse for doing less and less. I am sure that that charge cannot be laid against the Minister for Overseas Development. I know that she is indignant about any suggestion that she is dragging her heels in responding to the great human tragedies of famine, flood and war that have hit our planet.

I know that the Minister dearly wishes that the Chancellor would respond to her pleas to expand the aid budget so that she need not blush every time the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development raps the United Kingdom over the knuckles for being so mean. We were not surprised to hear her plaintive cries last week when she told the House that it was time to

"seek to make the aid programme grow in real terms"—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 734.]

She hoped that that would be achieved, but as the aid programme has been stagnant for two years with no real increases planned, perhaps she can tell us today if she would like even more help from the Opposition to enable her to make her case to the Chancellor.

The case for increasing Britain's aid is strong. While the British have been horrified at what they have seen on television and read in newspapers and have dug deep into their pockets, the Government's response to the current disasters has been little short of shambolic. The scale of recent disasters has been exceptional, but the Government's response has certainly not been exceptional. There is no doubt that what has been given has saved many lives, but it has not been enough.

I shall deal with the most recent emergency first. The cyclone in Bangladesh on 29 April was one of the worst disasters in history to hit the region. Hundreds of thousands of people have already died and up to 10 million have been left stranded without homes, land or crops. The United Nations and the Government of Bangladesh have appealed for $1·4 billion—£840 million—for immediate relief, but the total United Kingdom response has been just £6·5 million. The United Kingdom's contribution to the appeal for Bangladesh, based on our share of the gross national product of OECD donors, should be more than £50 million. Last week, the Minister and the Prime Minister claimed that Britain's response was the largest of any donor, but Saudi Arabia has pledged £62·5 million

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

and now, while our one Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship makes its way slowly to the Bay of Bengal, the United States marines are already there.

In Africa, the situation has been getting worse, and now it is desperate. Twenty-nine million people face starvation in 25 African countries. In total, Africa needs 5·2 million tonnes of food aid, but only 1·4 millon tonnes have arrived. There are just a few weeks left before the rains arrive, making the roads impassable. If the food pipelines are not filled now, millions of people face death by starvation.

The United Kingdom's total famine relief since last September amounts to £67 million, much less than the Overseas Development Administration's drought-related aid to Africa in 1984-85 when 1 million people died. That would be worth £135 million at today's prices.

In its report on the 1984-85 famine, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs said:

"The generosity of the British people has not been matched by the British Government."

If that was true then, how much more true is it today? The problem is that the ODA does not have the cash to cope and the Treasury apparently refuses to give new money.

The Minister will try to assure the House that the ODA's budget is managed flexibly to cope with disasters, but, as the same report by the Select Commmittee on Foreign Affairs states:

"The aid budget is designed to have a certain flexibility to enable it to cope with emergency relief. It is not designed to be able to cope with emergency relief on this scale."

Again, if that were true then, it is even more true today.

Not only is the ODA strapped for cash but its existing resources are draining away into the coffers of the Ministry of Defence. In 1984, when the airlift to famine victims in Ethiopia began, the Ministry of Defence paid the full cost. Then the cost was split 50:50 between the ODA and the Ministry of Defence for four months in 1985. In total, the ODA paid £8·3 million of the £21 million that the airlift cost, so why is the ODA now paying the full cost of military relief operations in Kurdistan and Bangladesh? Those costs involve £2,000 an hour for Hercules flights and £2,500 an hour for Chinook helicopter flights. If only the ODA had the clout to send the bill back to the Ministry of Defence.

In Germany, the Defence Department recognises the training value of using the military in civilian disasters. Therefore, the cost is shared between the military's training budget and the aid budget. The British Ministry of Defence's training budget is almost as large as the entire aid programme. The costs should be shared in the same way.

It is clear that the extra £20 million from the Treasury is going straight back into the MOD's pocket. It does not even cover the full cost of the MOD's bill, so the Overseas Development Administration's contingency reserve must be disappearing very fast indeed. As *The Independent* reported on 6 May, the £20 million was agreed before the Bangladesh cyclone, but the Minister said

"she would be pressing the Chancellor for more money this week."

What happened? Did she try? Did she fail? In February, in an interview with *The Guardian* about United Kingdom famine relief for Africa, the Minister said:

"If I needed more money I could go and get it."

Dare she say that again today?

The Minister said that she will have a stronger case for more money when her contingency reserve is all gone, but she cannot afford to wait. Last year she had to tell starving people in Africa to tighten their belts because the kitty was empty and the Treasury refused extra money. It is only the immense political pressure and the horrifying television pictures, along with the personal appeal of Mr. Jeffrey Archer, that squeezed new money from the Treasury for the Kurds. We can all be too sure that when contingency funds are needed next winter for a less politically sensitive part of the world, the ODA will be throwing up its empty hands in despair and the Treasury chest will remain firmly locked.

It is not surprising that the ODA is strapped for cash, because the aid budget has been slashed, as I and many of my colleagues and Conservative Members have said many times in the House. It is still 11 per cent. lower in real terms than it was in 1979. United Kingdom aid, as a percentage of gross national product, fell from 0·51 per cent.—and rising—under Labour in 1979 to 0·31 per cent. in 1989. Despite claims by the Government that the aid programme is growing, it is stagnant in real terms. The planned aid budget for 1993-94 is worth £1·7 billion in today's prices —exactly the same as the aid budget for this financial year.

The ODA's response has been slow as well as small. After the cyclone in Bangladesh, millions of people on flooded land could be reached only by helicopter, yet the ODA loitered for 10 days before even deciding to send four Sea King helicopters on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Fort Grange. They will not arrive for another week or more. When a disastrous cyclone hit Bangladesh in 1970, there was a British amphibious squadron there in just over a week and the Minister—wooden leg and all—was there in under a week.

We knew about the looming famine in Africa last September, so why did the ODA delay over half its aid for this emergency until last month? One reason is that it had run out of money, so it had to wait until the 1991-92 financial year. Another reason is that the Sudanese Government did not publicly admit the scale of the tragedy then, but we should not care whether the Sudanese Government bend on one knee or two to ask for aid when we could be saving starving people.

The ODA lacks not only the cash to cope but the staff, too. Few realise that the ODA's disaster and refugee unit is basically an enabling organisation that signs cheques in support of voluntary agencies. The unit's staff were increased from four to six to deal with the Kurds, and from six to nine a few weeks ago—a sorry contrast to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's around-the-clock Gulf crisis unit, with 50 personnel. The excellent but overworked staff have simply been unable to co-ordinate all the requests for and offers of aid. The disaster and refugee unit needs extra staff now to screen offers of assistance, filter incoming information and monitor the distribution of aid.

The ODA has also been unable to tap the generosity of the British people. Offers of assistance from doctors, nurses and relief workers around the country have been wasted because the understaffed disaster unit has been unable to process them. Tonnes of clothes have been left in warehouses because the ODA has not had the resources to fly them to the Kurds. For example, due to simple misunderstandings and lack of information, the ODA delayed flying 50 doctors from Cornwall for over a week.

Disasters are not a new phenomenon. Surely the mechanisms for dealing with logistical problems should be in place by now. There should be warehouses of stocks, or a system to tap into commercial stocks. As *The Daily Telegraph*, in a very good article headed "Emergency Aid —Why we need a force for action"—said:

"What has happened in Iraq is that the system has been exposed by the size of the catastrophe . . . So it is on such occasions that the British Government is exposed as having no system at all. The French have a force, an inter-ministerial committee and a minister."

The article went on:

"The Disaster and Refugees Unit is a first class lubricator of the work of the voluntary agencies, who swear by it. But at that level it was never designed to cope with the big emergency. What is needed is recognition on both sides of the House that the British Government does not have a disaster relief system."

The Minister tried to deflect criticism of Britain's response by attacking the United Nations and the European Community, but she is criticising the very agencies that this Government have undermined and underfunded. United Kingdom contributions to nearly all the United Nations development agencies have been cut by this Government. Funding for the United Nations Development Programme has fallen by 52 per cent. in real terms since 1979. On 9 April, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees appealed for $238 million for Iraqi refugees, but one month later less than $100 million had been pledged. According to the UNHCR, every cent has been spent or committed—usually before the ink was dry on the cheque. The United Kingdom's contribution of $95,000 was the lowest of all.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Does not the hon. Lady acknowledge that our contribution to the main UNHCR fund last year was the sixth largest of any country—that it was twice as large as that of France, four times larger than that of Italy and larger than that of Germany?

Mrs. Clwyd: That does not negate the point that I was making. If one looks through the list of United Nations agencies, one finds that in almost every case—the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNDP and others—the British Government's contribution has been cut drastically. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said, "We can do the job. Give us the money." Therefore it is totally unfair for the Government to criticise UN agencies when they are not prepared to give them the money to do the job. As Mrs. Ogata said:

"The UNHCR is not able to mount massive relief operations on credit. If further special allocations are not made immediately, the entire humanitarian effort will be in dire jeopardy."

In the case of the European Community, I understand that it was the British Government who led the discussions to reduce the European Community's special food aid programme for Africa by 20 million ecu. It is the Council of Ministers that refuses the Parliament's request to establish a permanent emergency aid reserve chapter in the EC's budget.

I have already outlined the immediate need for new money for the aid budget, for more emergency relief and for more staff in the disaster unit, but there is much more that must be done in the coming months and years. After the immediate relief effort, the next priority will be aid for reconstruction. The victims of famine in Africa and of the cyclone in Bangladesh need seeds, tools and cattle if they are to plant anything for the next harvest. The economy of Bangladesh has been devastated. The Bangladeshi Government have made it clear that the appeal for $1·4 billion is for immediate relief needs only and that there will be further appeals for reconstruction aid. Will that be forthcoming?

Before the next disaster strikes, the ODA's disaster unit must be revamped. It needs contingency plans to expand, with suitably experienced staff being available as soon as a major disaster breaks. Regional co-ordinators should be found to co-ordinate donations on behalf of the ODA during disasters. An ODA internal evaluation of the response to famine in Africa from 1983 to 1986 found that there had been little contingency planning by the ODA for such a large-scale disaster. It said that more staff were needed and that staff were too busy to monitor the implementatoin of relief efforts funded by the ODA or to plan ahead. It recommended training for members of the disaster unit. Have any of its recommendations been implemented?

Gales strike the coast of Bangladesh every day. Gales and cyclones will kill thousands more unless there is adequate investment in early warning systems and cyclone shelters. About 4,000 cyclone shelters are needed, but at present there are only 350. Our bilateral aid programme to Bangladesh is one of the largest. It should support a strategy for disaster prevention in future. In Africa, aid should be invested in early warning systems, with regionally held food stocks, transport systems and other measures to prevent a drought from becoming a devastating famine.

A mobile emergency volunteer force is needed. Doctors, engineers and other experts who volunteer to assist in times of emergency should be sent immediately to where they are needed; hence, selection and co-ordination must occur in advance. In Switzerland, disaster relief units can second experts for two to three months and emergency teams co-ordinate with the United Nations. In France, Medecins Sans Frontieres was working with the Kurds on Iraq's borders within days of the exodus.

Some mechanism must be found to tap the skills of British experts and to ensure that emergency relief reaches those in need as soon as possible. The Government should either set up a state-funded register of experts, as in Switzerland, or ensure that non-governmental organisations can afford to retain experts who can be sent out at short notice. We already have a capable disaster relief squad in the armed forces. The new international climate makes in impossible for the armed forces to be more involved in civilian as well as military emergencies, as *The Daily Telegraph* wrote:

"The forces' stock in trade is getting there 'fastest with the mostest' and nobody does it better."

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I hope that the hon. Lady will refer to the part of the motion which calls on the Government

"to set a timetable to meet the United Nations aid target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product."

What timetable would she wish to set, and what timetable would a Labour Government set?

Mrs. Clwyd: I shall send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the relevant section of our manifesto. We have promised

[Mrs. Clwyd]

that the next Labour Government, not now long awaited, will increase our percentage of GNP to 0·7 per cent. within the first five years of taking office.

United Nations agencies, particularly the disaster relief organisation, should be strengthened. Ministers, including the Prime Minister, are talking about the need for a new international agency for disasters. What do they intend to do about that? The right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, talked of precisely that when he was Minister for Overseas Development in 1988.

I remind the Government that the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation already exists. We should strengthen that existing organisation before inventing new agencies. Once the United Nations agencies are assured of sufficient cash to operate effectively, it will be worth reviewing their mandates to strengthen their roles. In particular, we must ensure that they can meet the emergency needs of people displaced in their own countries, as well as those of refugees who flee abroad.

The root causes of disasters, particularly conflict and poverty, must be tackled. Resolving bitter conflicts and civil wars is the only long-term solution for Africa, just as peaceful autonomy is the only solution for the Kurds. There are signs of hope, such as the recent agreement between the Angolan Government and UNITA for a ceasefire and elections. But all peace negotiations need to be underpinned by the international community through the United Nations. The richer members of the United Nations must be willing to give it the clout and financial resources to monitor and guarantee the peace process in Angola and elsewhere.

Poverty turns a drought into a famine or a cyclone into a human tragedy. Poverty forces millions of Bangladeshis to eke out a living in paddy fields on flood-prone lands. One of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh cannot possibly afford to build 4,000 cyclone shelters or spend 6 per cent. of its GNP on sea defences, as the Dutch do.

Action Aid's report on British aid to Bangladesh in 1988 found a massive shift from project to programme aid and increasing commercialisation of aid. It reported that little was spent on projects directly benefiting the poor. Long-term sustainable development is ultimately the best way to prevent disasters. Radical action is needed to alleviate the poverty of 1 billion people and to reduce the debt burden that is keeping third-world countries poor. Action to prevent global warming is vital, too, if storms are not to become more violent and frequent. As Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan said on 5 May:

"Unless you have some kind of new economic order, people will continue to move North: all the barbed wire, laws, and immigration controls in the world—nothing will prevent that."

A new economic order means debt relief, improved trade, more aid and a massive investment by north and south to eradicate poverty. Sadly, the British Government are not promoting such an economic order. We should lead the way forward at the G7 summit in London in July by launching an attack on poverty and debt, and if the Prime Minister has the nerve to call an election in June, the new Labour Government will do exactly that.

If the British Government are committed to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development, they know well the next step to take. It is to set a timetable to meet the United Nation's aid target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South) *rose*——

Mrs. Clwyd: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way. I am bringing my remarks to a close.

The United Nations is more entitled to criticise the British Government for taking Britain away from the United Nations aid target than the Minister is entitled to batter the United Nations for its failures. I cite these examples of the Minister's criticisms of the United Nations:

"I am concerned about the lack of speed of the United Nations in dealing with the problems . . . In the meantime, there is much work to be done in providing relief. In that sense, the United Nations must get its act together . . . We want an effective United Nations reaction, but it is taking a long time to get up and running".—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 777-82.]

Those are exactly the criticisms that we make of the British Government. Could it be that the Minister is looking for a scapegoat? Is it not a fact that she and her Government colleagues have lacked speed, that they should get their act together and that they need to get up and running? Perhaps they are suffering from fatigue—the fatigue of a tired and worn-out Government.

7.39 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's swift and continuing generous responses to the crises in Iraq, Bangladesh and Sub-Saharan Africa; and also welcomes the Government's initiatives to ensure the continuing effectiveness of United Kingdom aid and to stimulate improved international disaster relief delivery.'.

No one can look back on the vivid images of recent weeks without being moved by the suffering of so many fellow human beings. In the Gulf region, we have seen Iraqi refugees trekking into inhospitable mountains and across national boundaries to escape one man's tyranny. In Bangladesh, whole communities have been swept away by natural disaster. In Africa, a devastating combination of natural and man-made disasters threatens life on a scale at least as great as any that we have seen.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clywd) chose to put her case as she did.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister is reading, so how can she say that?

Mrs. Chalker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I will give way, but it is a little early in the debate. I am not reading; my remarks are not on the brief in front of me.

I particularly regret the hon. Lady's use of the words "slow" and "shamefully inadequate". I believe that she does not mean the words to be accurate or descriptive but uses them for effect, like the absurd claim made last week that the Government have a "secret agenda" for raising VAT. Although the subject of Labour's motion is aid, the context is its ongoing and futile election campaign.

Sir Peter Blaker: The House heard the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) read out the proposals that the Labour party has just made for reaching the United

Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP. Is not that exactly the same promise, almost word for word, that the Labour party made in 1974? Will my right hon. Friend the Minister tell the House how many times, in the 17 years that Labour has been in power since the second world war, a Labour Government have reached that figure?

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. Labour Governments have always accepted the 0·7 per cent. of GNP target, but in none of those years did they reach it. I do not blame the hon. Member for Cynon Valley for that, because we have not reached it either. However, we have no chance of reaching it unless we have proper economic growth, and we have proper economic growth only when the economy is properly managed. It was proved in 1976 and 1977 that we shall never have that under a Labour Government.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Minister take a second to compare the pitiful number of journalists reporting this debate in the Press Gallery with the much larger number of men and women in the Public Gallery? The British public are greatly moved by what they have seen on their television screens in recent months in Africa, Bangladesh, Iraq and Iran. I would be prepared to have a small wager with her that most people would be prepared to forsake any tax cuts that the Government may make for a positive promise to deliver what they want—a war on the poverty that they see throughout the world today. I hope that, in what remains of the debate, the Minister will say how the Government will deliver that commitment rather than play around with party politics in a pre-election campaign.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman's last words reveal exactly what he is about.

I wish to deal with the real world disasters that we now face. They are global in nature and demand a global response. I am proud of the part that Britain continues to play in our work overseas and to be associated with the efforts of the many people currently engaged in the British aid effort, whether it is in humanitarian terms, such as emergency relief, or in the regular development programme. That includes all my officials, the non-Governmental organisations, volunteers and hundreds more besides, many of whom have worked the longest weekday hours that I have every known and nearly every weekend since the end of March. I am deeply grateful to them. They have done it willingly—they have not been press-ganged into it—and they have had increased support as the weeks have gone by and new disaster has come upon new disaster.

Before I speak about the major elements of our response to disasters, I shall say a few words about their causes. At first sight, there may seem to be little that we can do to prevent the droughts and cyclones that have afflicted Africa and Bangladesh. However, underlying their impact are factors such as population pressure and poverty, which the hon. Member for Cynon Valley mentioned. We continue to tackle those through carefully targeted development aid. That is why I announced increased population planning grants for the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the World Health Organisation. When I saw Dr. Sadik, the executive director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities yesterday, I announced a 25 per cent. increase to £7·5 million.

We are also working in Bangladesh—which has been so sorely hit by the awful cyclone and the subsequent bad weather—with the World bank and other donors to put in place one of the largest population projects ever established, worth over $600 million, £12 million of which is the United Kingdom's contribution. We have been seeking to focus our work on poverty, particularly in the Asian countries, and 70 per cent. of British aid is going to the poorest countries in the world. I agree that poverty must be a key focus in our aid programme but we are carrying that through in our regular development programme and shall continue to do so.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): My right hon. Friend's remarks about the increased aid for the population programme are welcome, but will she do her best to encourage other nations, particularly the United States of America, to follow suit? Their record in recent years is disgraceful.

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We have already been working with other donors to try to make them increase their contributions on population planning. I hope that they will listen because we firmly believe in a constructive mother and health care programme, which can best be achieved by sensible family planning schemes throughout the world through bilateral and international programmes.

It is less easy to tackle the scourge of war, which is one of the other main problems affecting many developing countries. Those wars have contributed so much to the tragedy of Africa. There are signs of progress and we welcome, in particular, the preliminary ceasefire agreement in Angola and the talks to be held in London next week between the Ethiopian Government and opposition groups. Sadly, there are fewer signs of optimism for the people of Sudan, Somalia and Liberia, who still face fighting day in and day out. I assure the House that the Government will continue to work strenuously for peaceful solutions to all Africa's conflicts.

We must encourage good government in the developing countries. It is important not only for human rights but because good government, sound economics and free markets are essential if people are to feed themselves and corruption is to be rooted out. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley will agree that that is one of the key problems to be resolved. I was sorry that I could find no room for good government in the Labour party's latest policy document, "Opportunity Britain".

Donors should encourage developing country Governments to stop fighting endless civil wars. The Governments of those countries should let their farmers get on with trying to grow their produce and selling it in a peaceful and free market.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The right hon. Lady will recall that, while she was absent on a trip to the Horn of Africa, one of her colleagues at the Foreign Office assured the House that funds would be made available for transportation in the Horn of Africa. The hon. Lady will know that some money has been made available, but the major aid agencies, in particular Christian Aid, say that Hercules aircraft are still not flying and transportation has not been provided. Can she tell the House anything about that?

Mrs. Chalker: All the food aid sent to Africa by this country has been accompanied by covering transport costs. I have made it a policy that when we give food aid, we must ensure the means of its arrival at the proper destination. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have been seeking to plan ahead. There have been many problems in Sudan. I only hope that, since the arrival here of the Sudanese Minister of Finance, with whom we had some vexed words, a little more progress is being made in Sudan. The Sudanese Government have at least begun to talk about the size of the problem faced by Sudanese people.

It is not enough for disaster relief to be swift: it must also be effective. We heard a lot from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley about slowness. However, when dealing with such disasters, in addition to consultation with the relevant Governments, other donors, the international relief agencies and our own non-governmental organisations, we also need to ensure that all those factors are brought together. That means that not only we, but other donors, must be ready to dispatch the right assistance.

Sadly, there have been far too many examples of over-stretched transport facilities, clogged up with well meant, but unwanted, relief items, and of well-intentioned volunteers who have been prevented by the authorities overseas from joining the relief effort. The hon. Lady mentioned that, and I want to mention the problems that have occurred in Turkey, Iran and Iraq, where second-hand clothing, willingly donated by so many people, was turned back as unacceptable. That may seem strange, but we have to pay the cost of transporting the clothing, and if it is turned back as unacceptable it is obvious that we would have been better off using the money for other purposes. It is very sad that thousands of tonnes of unwanted clothing were sent overseas.

In the early days of the Iraqi refugee tragedy, there were people from other countries—not this one—hanging around airports in Turkey and elsewhere who were unable to leave and provide the help they wanted to give because they were not permitted to leave. All our volunteers have gone to the camps and places where they can help. That was why I insisted on careful planning, preparation and consultation in the country of the disaster to ensure that the donor assistance reached its target. None of those priorities seems to be reflected in the Opposition's approach.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Chalker: This is the last intervention that I shall take or I shall not be able to respond to the debate.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister consider the situation of some Iraqi students at universities such as the Heriot Watt, which is now desperately short of funds. Those students are precisely the sort of people that would be useful in future in a rebuilt Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: I am sure that if those people are willing to volunteer, they will be considered along with the many others who have done so.

I am also sure that we are right to ensure that the contributions that we make, whether to the United Nations or anywhere else, are well targeted. Earlier this year, before the Kurds, Shias and others left their homes, the Overseas Development Agency contributed £8 million to the United Nations agencies to meet the expected refugee outflows from Iraq. But as we now know, those plans were overwhelmed by the sheer flood of refugees towards Turkey and into Iran. At that time, the United Nations expected about 400,000 refugees to come into Iran, Turkey, Jordan and Syria, but in truth, more than 2 million refugees have crossed the borders into Iran and Turkey.

In the seven weeks since the human trek to safety began, the ODA has committed a further £62 million in humanitarian aid to Iraqi refugees, in addition to the special contribution being made by British troops. I shall return to the issue of Ministry of Defence costs later. The sums committed since Christmas, which total £70 million, are by any measure a substantial response to the needs of the Iraqi people.

We have flown more than 1,000 tonnes of tents, blankets, food and medicine into Turkey and Iran by cost-effective commercial flights. We used the RAF's Hercules and Chinooks to deliver that aid to the people in the mountains and on the roads, often in the most appalling conditions. So far, we have spent £6·7 million on the air bridge in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, £5 million of which is the additional cost of using MOD equipment.

We have financed the activities of British NGOs. Last week, 91 volunteers with medical, nursing and rescue experience went to provide every assistance to the refugees still in the mountains and help them make their difficult journey south and west to their towns in Iraq. More volunteers will follow them to carry through the work and extend their excellent contribution to the Iraqi people. I know that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley thought that that should have happened sooner, but it is no use saying that when planning is dependent on the position at the other end, as well as those who come forward and the preparations that are made.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The Minister has made it clear to the House that she will not take any more interventions.

Mrs. Chalker: I have indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, so as to allow as many speakers as possible to contribute to the debate. I have taken more than six interventions already.

Britain has led the international efforts to find a long-term solution to the crisis. It was our Prime Minister who willed the creation of safe havens in northern Iraq. From the beginning, British troops have been involved in the establishment of those havens. There is still much to be done—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) was heard in good order. I hope that the same courtesy will be extended to the Minister.

Mrs. Chalker: There is still much to be done, but I know that the House will be encouraged by the fact that refugees are now coming down from the mountains and moving into the safe areas in substantial numbers. That same process is also beginning to happen from parts of Iran. The UN's role is now developing in Iraq. To help that operation get under way, I announced Britain's contribution of $10 million to UN humanitarian relief for the region early last week.

In Bangladesh, Britain has led the relief effort. Our initial response of £6·5 million was one of the first and, then, the largest. More has since been added by countries such as Saudi Arabia, but that country has pledged its money not for immediate relief, but for reconstruction. One needs to look at the detail of what has happened.

In Bangladesh we financed the urgently needed supplies of tents, blankets, food and medicine, as well as tackling the appalling disruption of communications by paying for a Royal Fleet Auxiliary, with four helicopters with substantial disaster relief stores, nine boats and a detachment of Royal Marines. ODA vehicles are in use in the flooded districts and boats, including some from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, are distributing food when the weather permits.

Britain has financed two United Nations disaster relief experts in Chittagong from the beginning of the crisis. As always, we are working with British and local NGOs, who are doing a magnificent job to deliver relief to those in need. Our NGO co-ordinator from Dhaka set up an office in Chittagong a week ago to provide on-the-spot assessments and ease co-ordination among aid organisations locally.

However, it is in Africa that 29 million people face the worst disaster. The continuation of drought, long-running civil wars and economic mismanagement have worsened the crisis of starvation and illness. Britain's response has again been swift and substantial. The £90 million pledged by ODA since last September includes 158,000 tonnes of bilateral food aid, much of which is for the horn. That makes Britain the second largest contributor of food to the region. Britain will continue to play her part, but we need other donors to contribute too. That is why, for more than six months, I have strenuously pressed for more urgent action for Africa by other donor countries and the European Community. More than 800,000 tonnes of food will now be financed from the Community budget, with more to follow from other member states. But the crisis in Africa is a long way from being over. Our job over the next few months will be to continue to save lives and give people the means by which they will be able to feed themselves in future.

I now come to the financing of aid. We have heard more than enough carping about money from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley in recent weeks. We have also heard a lot about targets. The Government remain committed to the principle of the United Nations aid target, but I shall not attempt to compete with the hon. Lady to see who can promise to spend the most. Spending money for the sake of it is easy. Making that money really effective where people need relief is another matter.

We started this financial year with an aid budget of £1,721 million. It is a substantial programme—the sixth largest in the world. Its value has grown in recent years and it is planned to continue to grow in real terms. Our aid is well targeted and effective. Its quality and professionalism are praised by the OECD's development assistance committee and by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs.

We provide humanitarian relief without diverting resources from our planned development programmes, because humanitarian relief comes from funds set aside for that specific purpose, calling as necessary upon the Overseas Development Administration's in-year contingency reserve. In exceptional circumstances, we also have recourse to the Treasury reserve.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in a letter to the Leader of the Opposition, in the context of our efforts to help Iraqi refugees, that the Government were prepared to look sympathetically at the case for making additional resources available to the ODA for humanitarian purposes if it looked as though its contingency reserve was likely to be exhausted early in the year.

As the House knows, on 29 April the Prime Minister announced an extra £30 million for the aid programme for continuing assistance to Iraqi refugees. I had no hesitation then about going to the Treasury for that additional money, and I do not hesitate to do what needs to be done. I can assure the House that the Government will continue to look sympathetically at the resources available to the ODA so that Britain can continue to play its full part in the international relief effort to help alleviate the terrible suffering in Africa, and to assist the people of Bangladesh to reconstruct their lives. This afternoon in Brussels EC Foreign Ministers agreed a further 60 million ecu package of co-ordinated assistance to Bangladesh in addition to the initial relief contributions already announced. We are glad to contribute to that.

It is clear that the armed forces constitute a key element in our disaster relief capability. Let me make it clear to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley that the aid programme pays only the extra costs—of fuel and spare parts, for instance—arising specifically from the humanitarian relief operations carried out on our behalf by the armed forces. Our armed forces are doing a magnificent job in Iraq and in Bangladesh, and we applaud them for all that they do. But it is not for Britain alone to provide all the relief, money and solutions. The problems are international and they need international solutions. It is clear that every nation and group of nations must play its full part in a co-ordinated way.

Britain galvanised the EC's decision to provide additional substantial disaster relief—105 million ecu in the case of Iraqi refugees and 115 million ecu for famine relief in Africa in recent weeks. However, it is the UN which should play the unique role of co-ordinating the international response to disasters. I agree with the hon. Lady that the UN disaster relief organisation is good, but it is very small.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): It lacks money.

Mrs. Chalker: It has had resources and it will continue to have resources. I look forward to the UN takeover of the relief operations in northern Iraq. We want that to happen, but the transfer must be worked out. That is why discussions continue in Baghdad. A UN resolution may be necessary to achieve that end, but we believe that it is right for the UN to prepare to take on that role in the safe havens in northern Iraq.

I pay tribute to the International Committee of the Red Cross for its outstanding role in the humanitarian aid operations. It has been backed up well by Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and many other agencies. We applaud their efforts, but it is still the UN which must play the unique role of co-ordinating the international response.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Chalker: No, I have made it clear that, because of pressure of time, I shall not give way.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The Minister has made it clear that she is not giving way. This is a very short debate.

Mrs. Chalker: There is much to be proud of in both the British and the international provision of humanitarian relief, but we must continue to adapt and improve our response mechanisms.

At the international level, only the UN has the power and resources to mobilise the international community, but too often it has been hamstrung by a lack of clear leadership and co-ordination. Institutional improvements and changes in attitude are needed. The UN must lead and co-ordinate the international response to international emergencies. We believe that the time is ripe for reform. We have been discussing that idea with other like-minded countries. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister informed the House on 9 May, we want better international co-ordination of emergency assistance, and we are doing all that we can to bring it about.

We must also ensure the effectiveness of Britain's disaster relief system. In the past, the ODA has worked mainly through non-governmental organisations and other international agencies. They have the skills and experience to deliver effective relief on the ground. Our work has therefore involved the allocation of funds rather than the direct management of relief operations. A small disaster unit was adequate for that purpose, but the nature and extent of disasters have changed dramatically in recent years, and so have our responses. We have become more directly involved in the management of the responses. Increasing use of the armed forces is one aspect of that development. Another is the organisation of teams of volunteers to work in refugee camps such as those on the Turkey-Iraq border. In order to manage such operations, we have strengthened the disaster relief unit and its staff has been doubled. There is now a basic staff of 12.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Four, six, nine, and now 12.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman may shout as loudly as he likes, but it is not simply that the number of staff in the unit has been doubled. The rest of the staff in the office are there when their expertise is needed to back up the disaster relief unit. If the hon. Gentleman believes that maintaining a standing waiting capacity in a unit that would be used only from time to time is using scarce aid funds effectively, he has got it wrong.

Putting extra staff into such a unit is only one aspect of the challenge. The management of our disaster relief has already been under review. We shall strengthen our operations system by maintaining a permanent register of volunteers from this country with appropriate skills and experience. The first stages of that initiative have already been set up and have been used. That register will continue to be used because the volunteers will give us the capacity to mobilise multi-disciplinary relief teams at short notice.

I understand the frustration of some hon. Members. I understand their mood, but one thing that I know above all is that the value of the humanitarian aid that Britain has been providing and will continue to provide is second to none. There are a great many dedicated people both inside and outside Government who make that possible. We intend to make their efforts even more effective.

The Opposition motion is misconceived—it is a disgrace, and I ask the House to reject it.

8.9 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I shall be brief, not because the subject invites brevity but because many hon. Members want to speak in the debate.

This has been a year of exceptional disaster for millions of people in Africa, Asia and the middle east. The effects of three great calamities are with us. The first is the plight of nearly 2 million Kurds and 500,000 Shi'ites who fled from their homes in Iraq to the border areas of Iran and Turkey. The second is the ever-increasing threat of famine for millions of people in the Horn of Africa and Mozambique. The third is the violent cyclone that engulfed the islands and coastal area of the bay of Bengal only a fortnight ago.

On Thursday, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs was given the welcome news that the two helicopters on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Fort Grange had been increased to four. The news about that had been given the day before by the Minister for Overseas Development. I also understand that five American helicopters and four additional ones from India have arried in Bangladesh. That will greatly augment the capacity of the Government of Bangladesh and the relief agencies there to deliver essential supplies to the scattered communities on the islands and in the flooded areas around the bay of Bengal.

Unhappily, we have not yet seen the end of the calamity in Bangladesh. Since the great cyclone, a tornado has hit part of Dhaka, the rivers have flooded around Sylhet, and a second cyclone is reported as moving up from the Anderman islands area. The short-term measures that are now in hand to rescue people from starvation and disease from only the first part of a crisis programme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) made plain, the cyclone and its floods destroyed crops, drowned livestock, wrecked boats and severely damaged the infrastructure in the Chittagong area. Millions of people have been severely affected, and well over $1 billion-worth of damage has been caused.

Because of the poverty and shortage of resources, neither the Government of Bangladesh nor the people there can supply the seed, the livestock, the shelter and the boats that are required to rebuild their shattered lives and communities. That will make continuing demands on our emergency aid programme.

Inevitably, the budget of the Overseas Development Administration has been overwhelmed by the demands of those three crises, and its contingency reserve of about £70 million has already been used up or is certainly well committed. Of course there will be a generous response from people all over the country, and especially from the Bangladeshi communities, to the call for aid funds. However, if we are to make a continuing and effective response, further funds over and above the £30 million that I understand the Treasury has already committed will be necessary, and will have to come from the Government's contingency reserve. I am glad to have the right hon. Lady's assurance that she will press for extra funds, because they will undoubtedly be needed.

We should consider, however briefly, not only the immediate crisis but the longer-term measures that are needed to prevent or at least to mitigate similar disasters. There is no doubt that the cyclone shelters, pitifully inadequate in number though they were, were highly effective in preserving lives. However, I am told that none has been built since 1978. Following the great floods in September 1988, flood action plans have again been drawn up by the World bank. The United Kingdom has played a considerable part in drawing up those plans, but their execution, apart from the great embankment at Dhaka, has scarcely begun. If we are to avoid similar catastrophes in the years ahead we must increase our aid budget and must target it more effectively on life-saving projects.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Surely the responsibility for building life-preserving shelters in Bangladesh is primarily that of the Bangladesh Government. The right hon. Gentleman will know about the nature of Bangladesh Governments in the past and will know that offers of help were met with resistance and obstruction. The international community, and especially Britain through its aid budget, encountered great difficulty in trying to set up such shelters. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we should tell the Bangladesh Government that the erection of such shelters should be given priority, and that it is being done on their behalf?

Mr. Shore: Plainly, the Bangladesh Government have to be the major partner in all efforts to tackle the enormous problems in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, Governments in Bangladesh have been not only administratively inefficient but lacking in accountability to their people because they have been established either by martial law or by rigged elections. Bangladesh has just had, for the first time, a free election which produced a Government who are genuinely representative of the people of Bangladesh. That Government were at once overwhelmed by the tragedy of a great cyclone disaster, and that must earn them rightly deserved sympathy.

Our aid programme has dropped far below the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of GDP, which we accepted many years ago. If there is to be a peace dividend from the end of the cold war—as, in time, there will be—there is an overwhelming case for our overseas aid budget having the first claim upon it.

8.16 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) has made a typically constructive speech, which I am sure commands the support of the whole House. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who opened the debate, adopted a rather more partisan approach. I am sure that historians will applaud the role of our Government and country in bringing help to the Kurdish refugees in particular.

Under the terms of the United Nations resolutions that formed the basis of our participation in the Gulf conflict, we could not intervene until the Kurds were in flight. There was therefore an unavoidable delay in giving them assistance, but, even allowing for that, the dominant impression that many of us will retain from watching the pictures of the earliest relief efforts is one of avoidable confusion and muddle. That pitiful confusion must raise the question why we do not have a properly organised, Government-supported disaster team that can fly out at short notice to give help when there is a natural or a man-made disaster.

The needs of suffering people are usually the same, whether they have been afflicted by hurricanes, earthquakes, or a breakdown of law and order. They need medical care and drinkable water, and they need communications, so that those who are trying to cope can tell the extent of the disruption and can find out what is going on.

Our armed forces have transport aircraft that can get the right people and the right equipment to the scene of a disaster. The medical services of the armed forces have doctors and nurses who are trained to cope with the casualties of disaster. We have service engineers who are capable of dealing with water problems, and signalmen who can provide the communications that are needed. What we do not have is the system of getting the right people to the right place with the right equipment.

Why do not we have a proper disaster response system? It is not because there is a shortage of ideas. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley quoted freely from an article in *The Daily Telegraph* by my friend Hugh Hanning of the Fontmell group on disaster relief. He has produced so many practical ideas, and has been churning them out for years.

The ideas of the Fontmell group have been enthusiastically greeted within the armed forces, and similarly by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Indeed, they were cheered by Members of the extreme left and the centre left only a few moments ago. They also have the widest support among the centre right and the far right on the Government Benches.

Why has not more happened? I suspect that the answer is a degree of bureaucratic inaction. Many civil servants, as Sir Bernard Ingham has forcefully reminded us in the past day or two, have considerable energy and imagination. I suspect, however, that the civil servants who man the relevant departments in the Ministry of Defence and who deal with these problems are not equipped with the same imagination and energy. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, they have been a mite too bureaucratic in recent years in charging the Overseas Development Administration rather more than it should have been charged for services rendered.

The ending of the cold war and the restructuring of the armed forces implicit in "Options for Change" mean that the Government have every excuse for reconsidering the creation of a proper disaster relief team that would combine civilian and service personnel. I am glad that the steps will be taken that my right hon. Friend the Minister announced a few moments ago. Sadly, it seems certain that the number of refugees in the world will increase rather than decrease in the years to come. The most acceptable quick fix for dealing with the desperate needs of refugees must be to strengthen the resources of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

In the past, the Government have been understandably critical of the competence of some United Nations agencies, but the UNHCR is putting its house in order and is short of cash rather than competence. Like the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, I do not believe that we have any reason to be ashamed of our record in the support of the UNHCR over the past decade. Last year, we were the sixth largest contributor. We provided more funds than Germany did, twice as much as France and four times as

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

much as Italy. If the western world is to begin to cope with the refugee crisis, however, with the flood of refugees in Asia and Africa, the resources of the UNHCR must be increased. I do not believe that it is starry-eyed or idealistic to think of doubling the funding for the organisation during the coming year.

We are good at responding to special appeals, but I was saddened yesterday to receive a letter from a Foreign Office Minister—not my right hon. Friend the Minister of State—that told me that our contribution to the general fund of the UNHCR at the end of the coming year, at £20 million, would be the same as that made this year. I think that we should at least double our contribution, and that we should lead a campaign to encourage other rich nations to increase their contributions as well.

Finally, I make no excuse for returning to the problem of the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is the only place in the world in which large camps for refugees and asylum seekers are maintained on British territory. I know that the administration of the camps is a continuing source of friction and ill will between the Hong Kong government, the UNHCR and the British Government. Nominally, the camps are run by the UNHCR, but in fact it does not have the funds to do a proper job. Most countries do not contribute to the UNHCR operation in Hong Kong. They specifically exclude Hong Kong, because they believe that Hong Kong is a comparatively rich territory that does not need help.

America has provided more than half the funds for the UNHCR for use in the Hong Kong camps. Japan and the European Community together contributed half as much as the United States. The only other significant help has come from Australia, Canada and Sweden: their combined contribution amounts to one quarter of the American funding.

The burden on the Hong Kong Government has been increased and, in the run-up to the elections in Hong Kong in the autumn, the members of the Legislative Council are saying that they will not provide funds for any new accommodation. On the other hand, the number of people coming from Vietnam, which showed a marked decline last year, is increasing. That is why the Vietnamese Government face severe economic and political problems at home.

The existing camps are intolerably overcrowded, and thousands of young Vietnamese boys and girls are spending their entire childhood locked inside crowded barbed-wire compounds, with rudimentary schooling and no chance of touching, or even seeing, a flower or a tree. I understand the problem we face, and I also understand the Government's reluctance to become directly involved, but we can and should make a greater contribution to help those who are the true victims of compassion fatigue.

8.29 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I preface my few remarks by saying that I agree so much with the tenor of the speech of the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), and especially his reference to the work of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which is one of the better United Nations agencies. It is one of the more effective, yet it is sorely pressed for funds. I agree especially with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the refugees from Vietnam. Having seen one of the camps for the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong a few months ago, I hope that the hon. Gentleman's words will fall on receptive ears.

It is easy for Opposition parties to say in a debate of this sort that the Government are too slow to act and that they do not give enough in response to disasters. I have a feeling that we would say the same whatever the Government did —so let me get over that at the outset by saying that I too think that they have acted too slowly and given too little.

Mr. Speaker has appealed to us to make short speeches. I wish to make five points, which I hope will be constructive, about the structural lessons to be learned from disasters; if I can make them all in one minute, I shall be extremely pleased.

First, I agree with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) about the need for the Government to set a general target for their overseas aid budget. One improvement has already been made. The previous Prime Minister never accepted such a target in principle; she never allowed any reference to the 0·7 per cent. figure to escape her lips. Indeed, she always argued that there was a great role for trade and the private sector. I do not deny that, but it is none the less welcome that the new Prime Minister should accept that the 0·7 per cent. target is desirable.

My party is committed to supporting that target within the lifetime of the current Parliament, and we have heard that the Labour party is as well. It would be very pleasant if an all-party consensus could be reached, with the Conservative party putting a date to the target. It would not matter very much if we failed to meet it; if we established an aim, we could at least come back every year and complain that it had not been achieved. Let me make a serious point: we might then move towards the target rather than moving away from it, as we have done in recent years.

I do not want to indulge in too much self-flagellation. None of the G7 countries has reached the target, and West Germany and Japan are at about the same stage as us, while—disgracefully—the United States is well below that level. The Scandinavian countries, however, have demonstrated that they have the political will to achieve the target, and I think that we should do the same.

Secondly, I do not consider it right to raid ODA funds to deal with exceptional contingencies. At the end of her speech, the Minister read out some words that were intended to mollify us, to the effect that, if need be, she would always be willing to go back to the Treasury. That, however, does not answer the point made in 1985 by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which stated that exceptional tragedies should not be a charge on the ODA budget. I am sorry to bring up this subject again, but I object in principle to the fact that the Ministry of Defence should be able to say, "Yes, we will help, but the ODA must pay for the petrol."

When we mentioned that last week, the Minister said that we did not understand Government accounting systems. I can only say that, if the Ministry of Defence has to raid the ODA budget to meet some of its costs, those Government accounting systems are wrong in principle. The Treasury should be charged for any extra funds that are needed to deal with such disasters; the ODA budget, limited as it is, should not be expected to contribute to the MoD's costs.

My third point, which appears in the Liberal Democrats' amendment to the motion, relates to the need to establish a more effective rapid-response agency at an international level. I welcomed what the Minister told us about her Department's efforts to establish a register of volunteers; nevertheless, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation—apart from being small, as the Minister said—has not the equipment, the staff, the knowledge or the know-how to act quickly.

I am not certain that we have learnt enough from the way in which past disasters have been tackled. I read a report by one of our chief fire officers—I think that it was the chief fire officer in Kent—who had helped to deal with the Armenian earthquake. He made a number of useful points about the need to assemble lists not only of volunteers—the Minister mentioned that—but of agencies, experts, items of equipment, available stocks, tents and supplies of food and water around the globe. That should be done at international level. It is not necessarily a question of stockpiling at great expense in different parts of the world; it is a question of knowing where to go as soon as equipment is required, and of having the machinery to do that immediately.

At present, both the ODA and the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation respond only to requests made by Governments. During the early stages of the Bangladesh disaster, we were constantly told about the difficulties in communications, and it was said that we were awaiting requests. I do not believe that it is necessary to wait for requests before assembling equipment that will obviously be required.

I followed with great interest what was said by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). In the case of Bangladesh, the great embankments that were funded by the World bank seem to have proved less effective than the more limited local facilities that the people would have wanted. There is, I think, a lesson to be learned: when cash is given, it should perhaps be used to finance less prestigious projects that would have a more direct impact on the people involved.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there is little point in setting up massive stockpiles that could cost money, when we do not know whether we shall be dealing with a land or a sea disaster, or whether the temperature will be freezing or very hot. He also said, however, that we should have responded to the Bangladesh disaster before we had been told what was needed. Had we done so, we might well have sent lots of inflatable boats, and it turned out that there were a good many there already.

Sir David Steel: What was manifestly not there—and everyone knew it—was a supply of helicopters. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney observed, our response in that regard was both slow and inadequate.

In Bangladesh, an immediate injection of cash would have been enormously helpful. Local supplies were available within the country and in neighbouring countries —which, again, was fairly obvious. I am not being pernickety; I am simply saying that, in this age of satellite television, it cannot be right to take the attitude that we should sit around waiting for formal requests from Governments. A more rapid response is required.

Fourthly, in discussing disasters of this kind, we must not lose sight of the long-term programmes with which the ODA and other bodies are concerned. As one who knows Africa better than some of the other areas that we are discussing, I find it deeply depressing that, in the horn, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, famines are recurring that would have been at least partly avoidable if the countries concerned were not wracked by civil wars and maintained by shipments from all the world's arms producers—no doubt including this country in some cases. Another problem is our failure to achieve the standards of irrigation, well-boring and education that are required, on a long-term basis, if we are to prevent the return of famine whenever adverse weather conditions arise. When responding to immediate crises, we must not neglect the long-term needs of that area in particular.

While I am on the subject of the Sudan, let me tell the Minister that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who intervened on her speech, has passed me a fax from Christian Aid. It says that the rations for displaced people near Juba have had to be cut because of transport difficulties. The Minister responded earlier on that; will she now back up the request for extra transport funds that has been made both to the European Community and to her own disaster unit?

My final point is this. It is essential that we consider the disasters in waiting. I refer particularly to the advent of cholera in Peru, where I understand some 2,000 people have already died. Some 2 million may die by the end of the year if the international community does not respond. Sudden, unexpected cyclones are not the only causes of disaster. It is also taking our eye off the ball, being occupied with today's disaster so that we neglect disasters that are in the making.

We have just had a report from Frank Judd in Mozambique—whose appointment to the upper House I warmly welcome; as director of Oxfam, he will bring great experience in this field—and he has warned of coming disaster in Mozambique.

I have also had other reports—from Sierra Leone, for example—where there is a threat that the country may follow the path of Liberia if we are not careful. I hope that this will not happen. What worries me is that here is a former British colony and yet it is the American Government and the Nigerian Government that have given substantial help to the Government of Sierra Leone. I understand—I am open to correction if the Minister wishes—that all we have done is send one military adviser. I believe that we have a particular moral obligation to help a country for which we have been responsible.

As another example, there is the situation, already referred to, in Angola, where, thank goodness, there is at long last to be a peace settlement. But what do we discover? It is not a country in which we have a particular interest—it was, of course, a Portuguese possession—but the French have moved in; theirs has become the second language, and they are the people most interested in developing fishery protection and tackling the long-term development needs.

It is rather sad if we are losing our influence in Africa. We are failing to look after not only the interests of the people of Africa but also after British interests in extending commerce and trade.

I said that I would be brief. I have made five general suggestions. If the Government were to pass on three out of the five tonight, I should be extremely happy.

8.41 pm

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I listened to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) with interest, and he made a number of valid points, although I would quarrel with one or two of them. The right hon. Gentleman has a slightly false picture of our Government approaching the Government of Bangladesh about what help we can give. We do not sit idle and do nothing until a plea is made to us. If the practice is the same as it always was, and I am sure it is, we would certainly very rapidly have established communication with the Government of Bangladesh, but we would want to be sure of two things: first, that whatever we gave was needed and, secondly, that there was respect for the fundamental principle that, in aid programmes of any kind, we ask the Government concerned what they want rather than simply go in, override them and tell them what they will get. I am sure that that is an absolutely sound principle.

I also believe that the right hon. Gentleman ought to think a little more carefully about the extent of our aid programme. He has said that we should cover all the former British colonies; and goodness knows there are many of them, and many of them are facing very great difficulties. On top of that, he says, we should have major interests in former Portuguese colonies and in south America. But one of the troubles with our aid programme is that it is far too thinly spread; we cover far too many countries already. Rather than look for new areas in which to provide help, we should concentrate harder on providing more help in depth in those areas that we know really well and where we have really strong obligations and historical connections.

However, I do not want to carp at the general tenor of what the right hon. Gentleman had to say. I am sure that the whole House agrees that the extent of the crises in these three areas results in the bleakest picture that any of us who have followed this area over the years have ever known. The sheer awfulness of what has happened almost defies words. That is true, above all, in Africa. I believe that it is there that the gravest situations of all are to be found.

Apart from the intrinsic horror of what is happening, there is a feeling of lost confidence in the aid process, a feeling that aid cannot tackle these things. I do not think that the problem is one of compassion fatigue, although there may be signs of that here and there. I think that there is a kind of despair about what can be done to put these matters right or to prevent these crises.

The despair is triggered off by the fact that so many of the great disasters of the world are caused not just by natural events but by deep political difficulties. It is this that is making it so hard to tackle the things that have to be tackled. It is these political problems, as we see in the middle east and in Africa, that it seems to be beyond the scope of the aid community to solve. There is no need for me to list them, but they include the Kurdish problem, the Ethiopian problem, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, and so on. They are all suffering from profound political problems, which are causing the troubles they have to face.

The question is, what can we do about it? I have to say frankly that the simple remedy of doubling the aid programme will not solve these problems. I believe, indeed, that it would be very difficult to absorb a rapid doubling of the aid programme, certainly in terms of finding worthwhile projects. That is one of the strange things about this field—that, although the needs are so great, it is very difficult to find worthwhile projects to carry out.

It is fair to make the point that Bangladesh, of all countries, has received enormous quantities of aid in the post-war years. It has been one of the foremost recipients of aid, not only from the United Kingdom, although we have provided a lot, but from many other areas. Bangladesh still faces enormous problems, which have culminated in the recent tragedy. Sudan too has been a very substantial aid recipient until recently, when it became virtually impossible to provide it with aid because of the present hazards in that country.

We have to recognise that, as the critics of aid have pointed out, aid has often been used to prop up incompetent or corrupt regimes. It has not been able to achieve its objectives precisely for that reason. We also have to recognise that aid can even sustain a civil war rather than bring peace. There is a kind of minimum level of activity which is sutained by aid coming into a country, and this can occasionally stop people getting to grips with their problems and allow civil war to continue. Arguably, perhaps, that has been true of Ethiopia, and it is possible that it might happen in Iraq.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman will consider rather more carefully the tenor of his remarks in the past few minutes, because they not only encourage the Government to turn away from increasing the amount of aid given but discourage individuals who are giving generously to various aid programmes in Britain from feeling that they should continue. His remarks might encourage people to believe that there is no point in giving any money to anybody.

Sir Timothy Raison: I quite understand why the hon. Lady has said that, but I have constructed my speech to point out what I believe to be very genuine difficulties. I do not think that any of the things that I have said is untrue, and I can assure her that I have thought about them a great deal. But there are also some positive things that I want to say, so perhaps she will listen to them and recognise them.

The fundamental question which I think this debate has exposed is whether we need a change of strategy. In this respect, the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister was very interesting, and it is worth while considering what she was telling us. Perhaps the point that came over is that we have to think about the role of relief in the aid process as a whole. When I was Minister for Overseas Development, it was felt that relief was a kind of unpleasant necessity that was occasionally pushed on us, and that the whole thrust of ODA and development was long-term development. That was what the money was collected for, and the relief activities were something that had to be dealt with on the side.

Of course, the logic of that is absolutely impeccable. Nobody can deny that, if long-term development can be carried out, there is a chance of averting the disasters that lead to the clamour for short-term relief. That philosophy was absolutely right.

However, what we have to think about now—this is partly what my right hon. Friend was talking about—is whether, in our aid strategy, in planning the organisation of ODA and the way the budget is allocated and so on, we should not recognise that disasters play a bigger part than any of us had expected, and that there must be some change in the strategy and the way in which the Department is organised to have regard to that. That is one of the crucial questions that has cropped up today.

In a way, the wheel has gone full circle. I can take the example of Oxfam. When Oxfam began, it was the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, set up for the specific purpose of dealing with disasters. Over the years, Oxfam tried to move away from that concept and towards a very strong emphasis on long-term development; as I say, I think that the Government moved in parallel with it. But, like the Government, Oxfam has been forced back on to disaster relief. Since that is so, and since these ghastly disasters do happen whatever we might wish, my right hon. Friend is right to say that we must look at our capacity for dealing with these things.

It may also be said that, although disaster relief is not what we want to be about—it is a cruel necessity—in some ways it is an easier operation to run than long-term development. The record of a lot of long-term development which has been carried out with good intentions by dedicated and skilled people has, nevertheless, been deeply disappointing. The change has not been brought about in the third world that one might have expected from the quantity of resources that have gone into it. That is because the development process is itself a difficult one, and is complicated by political factors.

At least when one is dealing with disaster and famine relief, clear targets can be established. People know what they are trying to do and what they have to deliver and where, and they can get on with the job in a dynamic way. The ODA's record in that area has been excellent. The handling by the disaster unit has always been of high quality.

It may well be that my right hon. Friend is right—I suspect she is—when she says that perhaps we have to enlarge that side. It has already been enlarged, but perhaps that part of the operation has to be increased. It is quite on the cards that there needs to be a shift in the balance within the aid programme from the longer-term work towards the shorter-term work. I think that that applies also to other organisations around the world which are working in that area.

That means that we must carefully examine our ability to cope with disasters. In a way, we have made quite a good job of it. Sometimes, we have been late in the field, but overall our record has been good. But all of us, including the United Nations agencies, the EC and so on, need to do a lot of rethinking.

The response of the EC seems not to have been discreditable. I am glad that, just a few days ago, it made the decision to dispatch, I think, an extra 500,000 tonnes of food aid. That is welcome and has not received enough publicity, but we must look at the mechanisms for delivering disaster relief.

However—here I come back to what I have already said—that does not mean that development ceases to be a vital part of what we have to do. We can see in parts of the world, particularly in Asia, that great gains have been achieved by development. Many of the Asian economies, in contradistinction to the African economies, are getting on the move.

India, the vastest of all the aid recipients, is showing signs of strength which has gradually been built up. In particular, there are certain forms of aid where one can feel confident of the value of what is being done. I am a firm believer in educational aid and training aid, bringing people here for training or sending our people out to the receiving country. The record of the ODA and the British Council in that area has been good.

Evidently, population aid has to be of great importance. After all, it is the characteristic of the sub-Saharan countries that they have often 3 or even 4 per cent. population increase rates. Above all, there has been great value in the emphasis of the past five or six years on supporting those countries which are prepared to take sensible economic strategies on board and which really have been prepared to take part in a policy dialogue to see that the old ways are not good enough.

The long-term development work is vital. We are in some ways getting a clearer idea of how to bring that about effectively, certainly in the basic economic field. Our great needs are to press on doing all that we possibly can to deal with the political and military obstacles to development which are causing so much cruelty and grief. One profoundly hopes that the talks that are going on about the horn of Africa will lead to success. One profoundly hopes that, in Iraq, we shall not find ourselves with a prolonged civil war breaking out.

All I can say is that I believe that, in tabling their motion this evening, the Opposition have to a great extent missed the point. I do not think that their intentions are wrong, although no doubt they are pretty political, but we must look afresh at all our approaches to this difficult and important area.

8.54 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): There has been an air of unreality about this debate. Apart from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), the House has not addressed itself to the enormous problem that exists out there—or perhaps not so much "out there", as modern technology means that our people can see what is going on, and I do not believe that they will feel that we have had the kind of considered and urgent response to the problems of the third world that they are seeing in their living rooms night after night.

The simple truth is that Bangladesh is being struck by a cyclone of indifference every day of its life—as are Africa, Asia and Latin America. We have not begun to address the real problems that exist there in the way that those problems invite.

I do not wish to be uncivil to the Minister of Overseas Development, as she may well be fighting the Treasury in the way that her predecessor attempted to do—we shall try to give her some encouragement today—but would it not have been more honest for the Prime Minister and his various Ministers to acknowledge that, due to the recession which they have largely been responsible for creating, what we have been doing has been woefully inadequate, given the problems of the third world? In no way have we even begun to address the real problems of

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

long-term development which are so crucial if the problems are to be met. It is not enough to mount fire brigade operations when our consciences are pricked and to ignore what is going on for most of the time.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the former leader of the Liberal party, might think that I am being deliberately provocative when I say in the second aid debate that we have had this year that I am almost beginning to despair of the views that he is now expressing. When he calls for a consensus on these vital matters, does he really think that we should pretend that we have views that we do not have? Does he really think that there is a consensus even between the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) and the Minister?

Tonight, the Minister has expressed views which are a complete repudiation of the speech that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross gave to the Tory conference at Perth this week. I cannot believe that even the hon. and learned Gentleman, for whom some of us have a sneaking personal respect, would abandon common humanity to enjoy a few transient moments of tabloid fame.

Sir David Steel: I hope that the hon. Member is not going to drag me into this private fight. The consensus that I was seeking was on achieving the UN aid programme, and I know that he will agree with me about that.

Mr. Clarke: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman made that clear, and that I gave him the opportunity. In his speech he appeared to be asking for a consensus on wider issues and it has to be said that that consensus simply does not exist. It does not befit an Opposition to pretend that it does, in view of the fact that the problems that we are witnessing are not being tackled with the urgency that we believe is vital.

The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross did a great disservice to many people in his constituency, including elderly ladies who work for Oxfam, Christian Aid and the rest, and who ought not to be convinced that their efforts are in vain. I therefore regret his speech, but the House cannot ignore what he said because the real influence upon the Government's shameful policies in these matters may well be reflected in the sort of views that he expressed.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me what views I expressed?

Mr. Clarke: Because time is limited——

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: He does not know.

Mr. Clarke: It is not for me to remind the hon. and learned Gentleman of the speech that he made—from time to time, his recollection may be somewhat faded—but if he has any doubts, I refer him to the House of Commons Library and to last Friday's *Daily Record*. Then he might see the comments that he made, although I do not wish to dwell upon them because they are unrepresentative of the humanity that I believe the people of Scotland feel. Nevertheless, the hon. and learned Gentleman might have done a service to this debate. He has influenced people to believe that the Government are not giving the leadership that we so urgently require.

Frankly, it is not good enough for the Minister for Overseas Development or her colleagues in government to call for leadership within the United Nations when they are not giving leadership here in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: What utter nonsense.

Mr. Clarke: Despite her sedentary interruptions, the right hon. Lady has totally failed to explain why the Government have failed to honour their commitment to the target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product. I am willing to give way to allow her the opportunity to tell us whether that is the Government's commitment. Do they still believe in it? On Thursday, the Prime Minister, no less, told the House:

> "We have a better record than almost anyone in the world and we can justly be proud of that record."—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1991; Vol. 190 c. 822.]

The Prime Minister must know that [illegible] is absolute nonsense and is not justified by any facts. The Prime Minister need not go any further than our own Library to check facts.

What do we find when we check on our commitment to 0·7 per cent. GNP? Far from the Prime Minister being right in saying that we lead the world, we find that we are behind Denmark, which has achieved 0·94 per cent, France with 0·78 per cent., the Netherlands with 0·94 per cent., Norway with 1·04 per cent. and Sweden with 0·97 per cent. We are even behind countries which have not achieved the figure but are nevertheless doing better than we are—countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Germany and Japan.

The Government are not doing any service to the people of Britain or to the problems by pretending that they are doing better than they are. If the Government have financial and fiscal problems, they ought to tell us that that is the real reason. They should not try to make a virtue of lethargy, but that seems to me to be the case. The problems that we are debating simply will not go away if that is the Government's approach. Apart from the three areas of crisis that the House has debated today, we have witnessed a decade of economic disaster for sub-Saharan Africa, an extremely unhappy decade for the debt-ridden countries of Latin America. Yet we have also witnessed the fact that the political will on our part to deal with those problems and to offer real leadership to other nations within the UN does not seem to exist. We are therefore entitled to call for a Government who will give these issues real focus and leadership.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way. There are many more arguments that Opposition Members would like to make. It would be fine to continue the debate about taxation. The Minister seemed to give the impression that she would even prefer a cut in taxation to an increase in the Government's contribution to overseas aid. Perhaps she should make her position clear in her reply. It is not enough for supporters of the Government, including the Prime Minister, to pretend that we are doing superbly when manifestly that is not the case, and when a Back Bencher, the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross, gives a whole conference the impression that he thinks that we are doing too much and, sadly, gets applause for his views. It is profoundly obscene for us to

witness poverty, deprivation, squalor and death in the third world without feeling angry. As the debate continues, I hope that that anger will be articulated and will intensify.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Front Bench spokesmen wish to reply to the debate at 20 minutes to 10. If hon. Members on both sides are very brief, it should be possible to call most, if not all, of them.

9.5 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): The words of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) were clearly prepared to distort and disguise the important matters which I raised in Perth last week. There is no difference between myself and my right hon. Friend the Minister. The only difference is that last week she spoke second and I spoke first, whereas this evening she spoke first and I am speaking second.

During the time that the hon. Gentleman spoke, the population of the earth increased by five times the entire population of the city of Perth. Such a city is not built in two minutes, every two minutes. If we are talking about disasters, there may be disasters of cyclone or war, but the disaster which happens every day, every hour and every minute is the desperate increase in the population of the world. That is what creates the other disasters.

I am ashamed that the hon. Gentleman, having read a totally misinformed report in the *Daily Record,* using words which I did not use, should suggest that I am impiteous when a disaster occurs. If a person falls, or if a tragedy occurs, whether in Bangladesh, Somalia or anywhere else, it is natural for all of us to help. May I say to the hon. Gentleman, to the House and, I hope, to a listening world, that it is even more impiteous that we do nothing about the disaster of the increase of the world population, whom we cannot feed or educate and who are the result of unintended pregnancies.

I set up birth control agencies in Edinburgh because in my private practice I saw the tragedy of unintended pregnancy. The world is a tragedy of unintended pregnancy. The people who were washed away in the ghastliness of the Bangladesh cyclone were replaced last week. The population is on the increase again. What is the hon. Member for Monklands, West going to do about that? What will he do about the fact that the populations of Somalia and Ethiopia—thanks to Band Aid, or no thanks to Band Aid—are increasing on an exponential curve? What will the hon. Gentleman do about that? What is his lot going to do about it? What is Geldof going to do about it?

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose*——

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I will not give way.

What will the hon. Gentleman do? The answer is nothing, except express distress and complain that the Government are not doing enough. Then he will wait for the next plane or overloaded train in Somalia or Bangladesh, or wherever, to crash, and he will say again that the Government are not doing enough. In my opinion, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is one of the most responsible members of the Government. The way in which she has addressed such disasters as we are discussing has been extremely responsible, and the Government's response has been quite excellent in scale and direction.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fairbairn: No. The hon. Gentleman cannot just wander round to the Front Bench for the purpose of getting me to give way. Someone wrote to me saying, "I wish his father had used a condom." But I did not use the word "condom" in my speech.

The Government have been very responsible in the face of these disasters, but the great disaster that faces us all is the fact that the population of the earth is expanding out of control. Other disasters will occur increasingly until we address that basic fact. It is a matter to which we should be giving much more attention. I shall say so again and again, however much it offends Opposition Members, until we address the distress of unintended pregnancies in the first, second or third world, or any other world. That will be the answer to the tragedy of mankind. What is now the cause of that tragedy will continue to be the cause. There is no point in asking the Government occasionally to send a fire engine if the children are not prevented from playing with fire.

9.12 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): This motion is about famine, flood and disaster. The concern of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) may be gauged from the fact that he made no mention of the people who are currently suffering. That is what we are interested in today. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has said that poverty and conflict are at the root of the problems. Indeed they are.

Before the Gulf war began, I said that winning the peace would be harder than winning the war. Consider the billions upon billions of pounds that were spent on winning that war. We spent at least £2,000 milllion in the United Kingdom. What have we spent on winning the peace? We have spent £21 million on aid for the Iraqi Kurdish refugees and given £12 million to the EC. We are one of the smallest contributors in the entire EC. The Minister is shaking her head. Even if the figure were doubled, it would not compare with the amount of money that was spent instantly for the purpose of winning the war. One is forced to deduce that the Government are concerned less about winning the peace than they were about winning the war.

What is happening today? Arms sales are progressing apace. Every Thursday, the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Cabinet considers, among other things, the arms sales. But those sales continue. This week, the *New York Times* said that President Bush is strangely silent about the need to curb the sale of conventional arms to the middle east. The new weapons sent to the middle east by the United States in this year alone are worth over $33 billion. Eight of the 15 former top importing third-world countries are in the middle east. Another disaster, another Saddam, and we will have our eyes shut. Where is the new world order we were talking about? Was it merely the United Nations with a respray, which is now showing the old rust? We need not so much a new world order as a new economic order. That is the root of the problem.

[Mr. John McFall]

We went to the Gulf to defend our interests. As a tragic Kurdish refugee said in the mountains, "The Kuwaitis had oil and they were saved; the Kurds had no oil, so we were annihilated." If we say that we care about human beings —whether Kurds, Iraqis or Bangladeshis—we should treat them all the same, but we have not done so. The conclusions from the Gulf war are that it was a war about resources. We shall face the same problem time and time again, if we continue to keep our eyes shut, as we have done until now.

What about Iraq? We have heard nothing about the Shi'ites and we should be doing even more for the Kurds. But what about the innocent Iraqi people whose infrastructure was demolished in Iraq? We have not heard about them. We were told about smart bombs in Iraq—the reality behind smart bombs is that they bomb now and kill later. Every day, innocent Iraqi people are suffering from bad health and from lack of water and electricity resources because we have bombed their country. We have destroyed their infrastructure and we are not lifting a finger to help them.

I mentioned poverty. In the 1960s, President Reagan said, they fought a war against poverty and lost. I believe that it is individuals such as President Reagan and our former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) who have put us in our current position. They had a blinkered vision of the third world and they believed that the market would solve the problems. We know that the market does not solve them in developed countries, let alone in the third world.

It is no accident that the world now faces a litany of disasters. All over the world, the seeds of poverty are bearing a bitter harvest. I ask the Minister for Overseas Development, what will she do about that?

A month or so ago, I read in *The Daily Telegraph* about Bill Deedes, a high Tory by any measure. He went to the Sudan and, in moving words, he said that the animals die first, the children die next and then the adults take their turn to die. Twenty-seven million people are today facing that reality. During the Gulf war, we made that point to the Government, but the Press Gallery was empty so there was little response in the newspapers the next day. Twenty-seven million people are dying. What is happening in Africa today? Incomes are falling by 25 per cent., commodity prices have fallen by 30 per cent., per capita spending on health is down by 50 per cent. and spending on education is down by 25 per cent.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) mentioned Peru, which is undergoing a cholera epidemic. That epidemic could be prevented if money was used not to service debts, but to help the people. It is an obscenity that every United Kingdom citizen pays, if I remember correctly, more than £6 a week to the banks for third-world debts, to help commercial interests such as NatWest and other groups that recklessly granted loans in the 1970s. Every individual has to pay the price today, while the banks are let off. That is an obscenity, given the fact that millions and millions of people are suffering in the world.

I want a Government commitment that at the Group of Seven meeting in July they will declare an assault on poverty. The World bank has already said that a concerted effort will take 400 million people out of poverty by the year 2000. The Archbishop of Canterbury says that the first priority in his reign will be an attack on poverty. I want the Minister to convey that to the Prime Minister, and put the rhetoric into action.

An international disaster relief agency is essential. There are, I know, plans for that at the moment. In addition, however, we need a humanitarian support operation. We face today the cocktail of mass hunger. That is the recipe that lies ahead of us. The shades of 1974 —the last food disaster—are with us.

The point of tonight's debate is that the key to the problem is famine prevention. Until that issue transcends political differences, we shall get nowhere. Development is the best antidote to famine. The Government have made no commitment to that. Their record is abysmal. Given that their record is so abysmal, all that we can do is to vote against their amendment.

9.19 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): It is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). He told us about all the problems that face the world, many of which we would all agree about, but then he went on to blame the Government for most of them, or for not doing all that they should. That is the wrong impression to give. I believe that our Government have done as much as they possibly could in the circumstances.

I therefore congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on her caring, purposeful and, I believer, practical approach to the problems that we face. I, as much as anybody, would like the United Nations target to be reached. I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees with me about that and that she will do all that she can to enable that target to be reached as soon as possible.

Aid is always a highly emotional matter. In a way, that is no bad thing. Emotion can be the driving force for action. In that sense, it can help. Emotion, however, is no substitute for practical help, either in emergencies or in the longer term. Enormous amounts of money are constantly being poured into the third world—and rightly so—by Governments, voluntary organisations and other organisations such as Band Aid, to which reference has already been made. Furthermore, there have been the efforts of people such as Bob Geldof, but still we see the pitiful sights on our television screens, and people are asked to give more and more.

Why are such huge amounts of money still needed with such sad regularity? There are two basic reasons—first, the forces of nature, and secondly, the internal structures of the countries concerned. We can do nothing about natural forces—cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes, drought and so on. We may hate to admit it when we can put men on the moon and fly around the world in a matter of hours, but the truth is that some forces are still greater than man can cope with, and always will be.

To counteract the worst effects of disasters and to make peaceful progress within third-world countries, it is essential to have internal structures which will allow that to happen. Sometimes as a country we are made to feel very guilty about the problems in Africa. When colonial powers were involved in that continent there were no wars. People lived in peace. When colonial powers were in Africa, it was self-sufficient. People were not hungry.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Thousands were killed in colonial wars.

Mr. Lord: Now, Africa takes two thirds of the world's aid; then, it was self-sufficient. I do not want to turn the clock back to those days, but I do not believe that we as a nation should feel guilty about the fact that then Africa was self-sufficient, whereas now it takes such a huge amount of the world's aid. More importantly, it suggests that, in order to combat famine and disease and to cope when disaster strikes, we must have peace, stability and a workable infrastructure of some sort.

What can we do? How can we help? We can certainly give aid in the short term. We can also involve ourselves in long-term aid. We are doing that. We know, however, that the problems will return unless some fundamental changes are made to the way that many third-world countries run their affairs. Many hon. Members referred to the same point. Most of them were on this side of the House, but the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) mentioned it, too. We respect the sovereignty of all nations. We are told that we cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. That being so, how can we help if rulers will not let us help, and if corruption is rife? How can we help when a civil war is in progress? It cannot be done.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said that Africa needed a famine early warning system, food stores and a proper transport system. She suggested that others, perhaps the United Nations, should be undertaking such work. I agree that those tasks should be undertaken, but if we are not careful, by doing them we shall take over the running of the countries concerned, which we are not allowed to do.

While we cannot run the affairs of other countries, respecting their sovereignty often happens at the expense of the people of those countries. A way must be found to make the United Nations more dynamic. At the time of the Gulf war, even when we anticipated that it would be a horrific problem, we hoped that out of it would come a United Nations with more moral strength and determination, perhaps being willing to intervene on occasions when in the past it has not felt strong enough to do so. I urge my right hon. Friend to press her Government and United Nations colleagues to try to achieve intervention when that is in the best interests of the nations that we are trying to help, for without co-operation no amount of aid will help.

The basis difference between the two sides of the House is that Opposition Members seem to believe that by throwing money at the problems that we are debating, they will be solved. My hon. Friends and I disagree with that philosophy. I agree that more aid should be given, but until that aid is accompanied by co-operation from the countries that we are trying to help, disasters will continue to recur and, sadly, we shall have debates of this kind for many years to come.

9.27 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): It was clear during the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) that the Minister was becoming more and more embarrassed by his remarks, but Government policy is in reality much closer to the views of that hon. and learned Gentleman than one might think.

Consider, for example the position of Kurdish refugees in Britain today, of whom there are about 800. The British Government have the nerve to take to task the perfomance of the nations surrounding Iraq in endeavouring to cope with over 2 million refugees, when we in Britain spend money not on trying to help Kurdish refugees—to permit them to have political asylum and stay here—but on sending them back to face whatever horrors may be inflicted on them. The Home Office sought and obtained an extra £12 million from the Treasury to achieve a faster turnround of people who face death on their return to Iraq.

The Minister said that war was part of the problem, and that is true. Why then do the Government permit the Birmingham arms fair to go ahead? Why are they not taking a closer look at the affairs of countries to which Britain sells arms? We should be making greater efforts on that front.

The Minister said that giving 0·7 per cent. of our GNP in aid would not be achievable unless the economy improved. But 0·7 per cent. is a proportion, not a sum of money. We want that proportion to be achieved regardless of the performance of the economy. As the economy improves under a Labour Government, 0·7 per cent. will be a vastly increased sum going to world aid.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) talked a lot of nonsense about the good old days of imperialism, when there were no wars and the countries now needing aid were self-sufficient. Has he never heard the expression "economic imperialism"? One does not have to be in full control of countries to dictate what goes on in them.

As I have time to take only one example, I shall cite that of Sierra Leone, which used to be fully self-sufficient in growing rice for its people and preserving their lives. That country cannot be held responsible for the fact that Liberia's civil war is spilling over into Sierra Leone. We have a treaty with Sierra Leone, but it is receiving no aid. In the meantime, far from growing its own rice, it must import every grain from the United States and pay massive debts to the International Monetary Fund and bankers. It is suffering from having built up massive debts and interest rates.

Countries such as Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, El Salvador and many others whose populations are in desperate poverty are compelled by rich western countries to run their economies in a way that does not help their people but simply provides more profit for the rich countries of the world. The Government must face up to that real issue, which a Labour Government will address, and talk about solving it. To talk about contraception in that context is obscene nonsense.

9.31 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): The House can always tell when an hon. Member gets uncomfortably close to the truth, especially if he or she expresses views that contain a grain of truth. People laugh nervously and then scatter and hide behind the parapets.

I should like to read the following passage:

"The population problem in Bangladesh is awesome. The problem of people has been defined: too many, too close, too young and too late . . . there are too many women starting child-bearing too early, before they are fully grown. They are under-nourished and have too many babies too close together, which not only undermines their own health, but also that of their babies. Fifty per cent. of babies born in Bangladesh are below normal birth weight and almost all mothers are anaemic. More than ninety per cent. are born at

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

home, and the majority delivered by untrained attendants; resulting frequently in tetanus for mother or child, which is almost invariably fatal. This is part of the vicious cycle faced by females, starting when they are born, that has to be broken."

Those are not the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) or a statement from the Government. They come from Fiona Duby, who is a health worker on an NGO project in Bangladesh, and they appeared in the British Overseas Aid 1990 annual review.

We may not like the way our colleagues sometimes express things that happen to be true, but on over-population, but we laugh at them at our peril.

9.33 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This debate could not be more timely. The most appalling disasters have occurred in Bangladesh, Kurdistan and Africa. There is no shortage of popular support for getting aid and help to those disaster areas.

However, I deplore the way in which journalists keep writing about donor and aid fatigue, because it is very damaging to non-governmental organisations that are doing their best to get aid quickly to those who need it most. Journalists could do more useful work by writing about the background to those disasters rather than speculating about donor fatigue.

The case of the Kurdish people has been raised in the House many times. Indeed, I have been highlighting their plight for many years. Clearly, they have the most desperate short-term needs for medicine, blankets, food and engineering help, just to survive. As we speak, children are dying on the mountains, and many people are dying of starvation in that region.

Unless a long-term political solution is found to the aspirations of the Kurdish people, the problem will return time and again. Sadam Hussein has always done deals with the Kurdish people when he is weak and has killed them when he is strong, as he did in 1988 at Halabja.

Emergency aid is desperately needed. The British Government could find more than £1 billion to fight the Gulf war, without any vote in the House to support their decision, so I find their niggles about small sums of money in an aid budget quite distasteful. If we were serious about conquering hunger, the world arms bill alone could do so. The question is whether there is the political will to do so.

The 1980 World bank report stated:

"present output of grain alone could supply every man, woman and child with more than 3,000 calories and 65 grammes of protein per day. Eliminating malnutrition would require redirecting only about 2 per cent. of the world's grain output."

Those figures were relevant in 1980. Obviously, the exact figures have changed now, but clearly the world would be capable of feeding itself if wealth were properly distributed throughout the world. A recent World Food Programme report showed that 29 million people in 25 countries—mainly in Africa—were at risk of immediate death from starvation. Against that background, we must consider the economic relationship.

Some 100,000 people in Bangladesh have died as a result of the recent cyclone, and 10 million people are homeless. Polluted drinking water and various other problems will hit that country very quickly. Those problems will not go away and must be faced in the spirit that we live in one world and one planet. At present, instead of vast amounts of aid flowing from the richest to the poorest countries, the wealth flows the other way, as it has for every one of the past 200 years. The debt crisis affecting third-world countries at present means that, in real terms, they are subsidising the banking systems and commodity brokers of the north, at the expense of their own people. The closure of hospitals and health services in Mexico, Peru, Bolivia and other countries, insisted on by the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, is a major part of the problem.

We have a role to play in providing rapid emergency aid, and we must do so. We also have a role to play in providing programme aid to ensure that there is consistent, long-term economic and agricultural development in those countries. We also have a responsibility to ensure that the debt problems of third-world countries are solved. Those problems are best met by writing off debts, which prove an unbearable burden for those countries. We must also insist and ensure that the real prices of the commodities produced by third-world countries increase. In a basket of commodity prices, most countries now receive less in real terms than they did in 1950—more than 40 years ago.

Unless we address these problems, the basically economically based disasters—albeit some of them are environmentally based—will return to haunt us again and again. We must do something to write off the debts and restore a balance in the world's wealth, to ensure that the real wealth created goes to those who most desperately need it, not to finance the profligate consumption of the super-rich of western Europe and north America.

9.37 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I have time to raise just one item—British aid to the Kurds.

The generosity of the British people in assisting the Kurds has been considerable. It was reflected in the events of this weekend, but that was by no means the extent of the generosity, because we are now seven weeks into the problem faced by the Kurds.

As soon as the pictures came on to our television screens, people up and down this country got together in communities and villages and started to collect blankets, groundsheets, tents and the necessary supplies to be sent out to the Kurds. By 4 April, a group called British Aid for the Kurds had been established—a successor organisation to that which sent parcels to the British troops during the Gulf war. That was a straightforward exercise, because there were plenty of MOD aeroplanes flying to the Gulf, so supplies could be sent.

But there have been massive logistical problems in getting British aid to the Kurds. The ODA has not been able to respond to the work that has been done as it could have had the resources been available. That has nothing to do with shortcomings on the part of the people in the disaster unit, who have worked admirably in difficult circumstances. The problem is the vast shortfall in the resources provided for the ODA to handle crises.

There is a big unwritten story that the media have not got hold of—about how people responded as soon as the crisis was known, and how it has taken so long to get the goods out to Turkey, and especially to Iran. We have often had to depend on Iran Air to fly the goods out, and until

recently it has had to pay landing charges at Heathrow. Indeed, I understand that Iran Air still has to pay landing charges if the flight is considered scheduled.

The case of British aid for the Kurds reveals the inadequacy of the ODA, and its inability to handle three massive crises at one time. Its procedure for handling what we may call normal passing disasters is to send two 707s with medical and other supplies and to buy goods in local markets to provide assistance in an area. That procedure is not capable of beginning to touch the problems in Bangladesh and the horn of Africa, or the problems of the Kurds. In short, the Government need to adjust their operations.

9.42 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am pleased that all the Members who wanted to contribute to this important debate have been able to do so—albeit rather briefly in the case of the last few speakers.

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) asked us to bear in mind the important issue raised in a rather eccentric fashion by the hon. Member for Tayside, North. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are not unaware of the problems associated with population and development. There is an active all-party group on population and development chaired by the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). I have not seen the hon. Member for Tayside, North attending its regular meetings.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not the Member for Tayside, North. I represent Perth and Kinross.

Mr. Foulkes: I must apologise profoundly to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). I never thought that I would be able to insult him.

It is an unusual pleasure to be able to start by welcoming some of what the Minister has said. I welcome first what I interpret as the announcement of the establishment of a mobile emergency volunteer force with doctors, engineers and other experts available to be mobilised and sent immediately to help when disasters happen.

Secondly, I welcome the expansion of the disaster unit. A few weeks ago it consisted of only four people. After our private notice question on 3 May, the number rose to six. After the statement demanded by the Opposition on 8 May, there were nine people, and today it has been announced that the number is now 12. After a few more private notice questions and statements, and a few more debates initiated by the Opposition, perhaps we shall get a disaster unit big enough to cope with the scale of these disasters. The people in that unit do not stand idly by when there are no disasters—planning is an essential element in coping with disasters, and the unit will be planning for potential disasters of all kinds.

Much of what the Government have done over the past few months has been in response to pressure from the public, the media and, if I may say so, from the Opposition. I shall not disappoint the Minister by congratulating her on everything, however, for there is much more to be done. I intend to repeat some of the unanswered questions and deal with some of the Government's misinformation.

The aid budget is inadequate. It has been squeezed again and again as existing allocations have been used to help cope with disasters. We are only one and a half months into the financial year and already about three quarters of the contingency fund has been used. It is fairly certain that in the next 10 and a half months there will be more disasters to cope with. There are major demands on the programme from other parts of the world, and parts of the programme will inevitably be harmed if more and more is taken out of an already small budget to help in disaster areas.

The budget is already 11 per cent. down in real terms. The Prime Minister said that this country is generous, and the Minister for Overseas Development implied that the budget is increasing. That is untrue. The Minister's answers to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) show that the aid budget is on the way down. Trying to meet extra needs and demands from a shrinking budget clearly places great strain on other aspects of the aid budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) asked the Minister about extra funds. My hon. Friend quoted from *The Guardian*, and the Minister has said several times that she would be prepared to ask for more money. In a debate earlier this month I tried, as always, to be helpful. In reply the Minister said:

> "I believe that more resources are necessary in these exceptional circumstances, but, however helpful he might think his comments are, the hon. Gentleman must leave to me the approaches that I have made, and continue to make, for the resources that I need to carry out my job efficiently."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 741.]

In her winding-up speech, will the Minister state clearly the results of her approaches? How much new money—not money from the contingency fund or from the overstretched aid budget—is there for the Kurds, for Bangladesh and for famine in Africa? We have tried to get a straight answer but we have not received one. We want a straight answer now.

Ministry of Defence charges were raised by hon. Members on 3 May, 8 May and in this debate. If the reason is not cost, why are the Government reluctant to mobilise the forces of the Ministry of Defence? Those forces have the experience and the will to carry out the task, and they have the equipment and personnel. Field Marshal Lord Bramall has said that they are ideally equipped for that task, but the Minister says that the ODA has to pay the extra costs.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) quoted Hugh Hanning of the Fontwell group. Mr. Hanning has conducted much work on the matter. He has produced a pamphlet and written many articles and, as the hon. Member for Beckenham said, he clearly understands the issue. Hugh Hanning said that the United Kingdom is the only country whose Ministry of Defence does not deduct training costs from the charges that are made. Will the Minister make that absolutely clear, and will she approach the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury to make sure that the extra burden of training costs does not fall on the already overstretched ODA budget?

I am afraid that the Minister's strategy has be be described as diversionary tactics. One of my hon. Friends referred to it as scapegoatism. The Minister blamed the delay in mobilising forces and assistance in Bangladesh on the weather. One of my hon. Friends tried to intervene to suggest that the right hon. Lady might have been on holiday at the time and that that might have delayed the response. In the context of the famine in Africa, the right

[Mr. Foulkes]

hon. Lady attacked bureaucracy in the European Community and the following week she had to apoligise to the Community because she was wrong.

Now the Minister is attacking the United Nations. She is saying, "It is not the fault of the British Government; responsibility lies with the United Nations." All the United Nations agencies are having to work with both hands tied behind their backs because of the collapse of the funding and assistance made available by the Government to the United Nations.

Several hon. Members, and especially the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir. T. Raison), spoke about the despair that is felt in tackling some of the problems, given their magnitude. He was a Minister for Overseas Development, and he has discussed these issues before. Indeed, he has raised them again and again.

Most of the despair in most of the countries where there are disasters arises from the huge debt burden that most of them have to bear. There is not, as some Conservative Members fondly imagine, a huge transfer of resources from the rich countries to the poor. Given the payment of interest charges and the repayment of debt, there is a net transfer from the poor countries to the rich, despite all the aid that we give. There must be major debt forgiveness. Help must be given to the countries that are so poor.

We have a moral responsibility, and humanity should motivate us in this place as it motivates the British people outside. The British people are generous with their voluntary donations and the Government must match that generosity. The British people want a swift response, and the Government must give it. We want to see a response out of common hunanity, but we also want to see political stability and economic prosperity in the countries where disasters have struck. In that way, we shall have security and safety in working with countries that we know to be politically stable and economically prosperous. It is in our interests to help them, as well as in the interests of the poor and of the peoples who are threatened with debt in so many countries around the world.

9.51 pm

Mrs. Chalker: We have had a good debate. It has been rumbustious at times, but it has revealed yet again the concern and anxiety that is felt on both sides of the House in response to a great issue. Our anxiety is fully shared by the British people. That was shown by the magnificent response on Sunday to the Simple Truth concert.

I shall try to respond to some of the comments that have been made in the debate, but before doing so I say that, as politicians, we must respond constructively and practically when dealing with the public purse. That response has been forthcoming, and in recent months £70 million has been provided for the Iraqis and £90 million for Africa. A starting sum for Bangladesh—I have always made it clear that it was for immediate relief—is the £6·5 million that has been announced so far.

There have been some interesting contributions to the debate. For the first time in history, I found myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). I agreed with what he said about journalists reporting the debate, and with his remarks about the need to resolve the situation of the Kurdish people.

I do not always quote *The Guardian*, but this evening I shall quote from the "Notebook" column:

"The British government's leadership in each of the current international relief operations—for the Kurds, Bangladesh and Africa—is indisputable. It has moved quickly, efficiently and generously to deliver the right kind of assistance to those who most need it in meaningful amounts."

If the Opposition do not believe what they read in *The Guardian* today, I shall. Many fair-minded people share the view expressed in the column to which I have referred. That is why I have consistently paid tribute to my staff, to non-governmental organisations and to all others who have helped. Such remarks, however, will not discourage us from considering urgently what further improvements can be made to the way that we and the international community distribute aid.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Chalker: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have only seven minutes to complete my speech before the House divides.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister has still not answered my question.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman if he will stop making a noise. I shall tell him where I was.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Answer the question!

Mrs. Chalker: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman where I was, if he will listen. On 27 March, I was in my office. On 28 March through to 4 April, I was ill, unfortunately. I kept in touch with my office by telephone and fax machine throughout that time. If the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has not suffered the pain of a gallstone, he does not know what it is.

I referred earlier to our review. UN co-ordination is needed urgently. I was not criticising individual agencies, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) seemed to think; I was expressing my regret—I know that my view is shared by many other member countries—that, despite the excellent efforts of people "on the ground", we were not able to secure co-ordination with those at the top to bring together the available resources quickly. We are now working to solve that problem, as we have been doing for some time. It was last September, when I went to Jordan, that I realised that it was a problem. The review that we have set in train—which deals with how we should handle major disasters simultaneously—is going well, and I hope that before long I shall be able to inform the House of the outcome.

I have taken note of the many comments that have been made tonight by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) that there has been a loss of confidence in the aid process as such; the current frustration is, I think, caused by the size of the problems that are developing, and the frequent inability of receiving Governments to work with donor Governments to resolve those problems. Things have improved in many of the countries concerned, for the simple reason that many more countries are now working away at the process of economic reform. It is interesting to note how much better they have done in terms of growth—as shown by the World bank's long-term report—when they have undertaken economic reform programmes.

I understand the deep concern about debt. Let me point out, however, that it was the present Prime Minister who took the lead as Chancellor, building on the debt cancellation initiative of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) in 1987. That is how we worked out the Trinidad terms. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out those terms imaginatively and generously. They called for the cancellation of two thirds of eligible official bilateral debt, and for the repayment of the balance over 25 years. The Trinidad terms are a British initiative, which has been welcomed by donors and debtors alike. Our aim is for them to be accepted by the G7 summit that will be held in London in July, and we are working towards that.

The question of money is important. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), alas, was not listening to what I said so carefully in my opening speech, because he was talking to his hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley. I said that the Government would continue to look sympathetically at the resources available to the ODA, so that Britain could continue to play its full part in the international relief effort to help alleviate the terrible suffering in Africa, and to assist the people of Bangladesh to reconstruct their lives.

There is no dispute about the fact that the aid budget was cut nearly a decade ago as part of the process of getting total public expenditure under control. It has, however, increased in real terms in the past three years. New money has been made available: that is my straight answer. Already this year, £30 million from the Treasury has been added to the aid budget.

Let me also say to the hon. Gentleman—as I have said before—that I am engaged in discussions. I am not in a position to give him answers and, in any event, those answers must be answers to the very necessary case that we make. I believe, however, that MOD costs are entirely proper. My understanding with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about the training value of the relief operations will be taken into account in the amount charged to the ODA.

I commend the Government's amendment, and ask the House to reject the Opposition motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 292.

Division No. 143] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*

Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's swift and continuing generous responses to the crises in Iraq, Bangladesh and Sub-Saharan Africa; and also welcomes the Government's initiatives to ensure the continuing effectiveness of United Kingdom aid and to stimulate improved international disaster relief delivery.

PETITION

Wolverhampton Group of Steel Companies

10.12 pm

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I bring a petition on behalf of Simon Fletcher who is petitioning this House because he believes that there have been grievous miscarriages of justice with regard to various companies, principally the Wolverhampton group of steel companies, for a long number of years.

Wherefore your petitioner prays that your Honourable House may be pleased to Order a Bill of Review of the matters set forth or to Order such other enquiry or course as to your Honourable House may seem fit in order to examine and evaluate the said miscarriage and to give relief to all other the Companies named together with their bona fide Creditors and/or Contributories in the said Liquidations and the right of the last named to the enjoyment of free association by restoration of such Companies to the Register (due allowance being made in cases of the *Wolverhampton Group of Steel Companies* for the properly ascertained Compensation payable and allowable to each in its own right pursuant to the two several Nationalisations of the Steel Industry which have occurred and of whose benefits (they) have been denied less such sums as were realised and properly applied in each several Liquidation on fair and level terms as is and has been given to all other Her Majesty's Subjects.

And your petitioner as in duty bound, will ever Pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Oil Fires (Kuwait)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Richard North commenced his striking *Sunday Times* colour supplement report:

"Man's assault on the air he breathes was never so blatant, wilful or ugly, as it is in the oil fields of Kuwait. Up to 5 million barrels a day of excellent light crude, among the easiest to refine in the world, is burning filthily—enough to match Britain's daily consumption every eight hours."

The Secretary of State, whose presence I very much welcome as a courtesy, will recognise from his recent visit the description by one of my service constituents that the midday sun was like the midnight moon.

That leads me to the first of a number of questions of which I have given notice to the Minister. The first is to ask for an objective report from Sir Donald Acheson, the chief medical officer, on his view of the dangers of hydrogen sulphide and the number of parts per million which could cause serious respiratory disease. When sheep have been slaughtered and their lungs examined, black spots have been found on the lungs. Are black spots also, one wonders, found on the lungs of human beings?

My greatest concern, after talking to world authorities in Edinburgh, Cambridge and Oxford whose names are known to the Minister, is about polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. I do not think that there would be much dispute that polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are carcinogenic—they cause cancer. If, as we are told, these have been identified, I hope that the Department of Health report will give its view. I hope that it will also say what happens when temperatures go up to 120 deg F. concentrating the smoke into a thicker, low-lying cap over the desert sands.

Perhaps the problem can be encapsulated in the sad and ironic tale of the 17 scientists who were going round Kuwait with their clipboards, asking residents about their symptoms, about the water they drank and about the silent killer, water-borne disease. They found at the end of the first day that the forms were splattered with oil and, in a sense, the medium was the message.

Normally I do not submit to the House anonymous letters, but I know that this is genuine:

"I wrote to you a few days ago regarding our troops in Ahmadi and Kuwait City.

The news continues to make very grim reading. Day becomes night—sitting with only the light from candles in oil-smoke filled corridors. What is achieved other than a deterioration in health?

Letters are taking up to 22 days to reach home. THREE WEEKS is a dreadful length of time to wait for news.

They are our forgotten Army—no proper back-up now; after all, the War is over, isn't it?

Someone must do something about getting our Service Personnel out of that Hell hole before permanent damage is done to their health. They would be better employed in northern Iraq.

I am sorry not to be able to give my name but you are not supposed to interfere when your loved one is serving in the Forces."

I welcome the presence of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I hope that inquiries will be made of our servicemen as to what they are now going through.

Secondly, I refer to the Secretary of State's helpful letter of 7 May, in which he outlines the need for massive logistical support. Who will organise this massive logistical

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

support? It is not my business to try to abuse the Kuwaitis, who have been through terrible things. But is it not the case that Kuwait is paralysed and cannot undertake this task? As the fires rage, the situation gets worse. I ask specifically why for so long, it was left to Bechtel and, for example, Robbie Middleton, who accompanied the Secretary of State on a journey that I am told by several people was very successful. I have to be candid and say that I gather that the Secretary of State led that mission very satisfactorily. On that score, there is no criticism at all from me, but I must ask why the matter was left to the Americans for so long.

Where will the transport come from? Where will the water supplies come from? Where will the specialised equipment come from? What attention is being paid to the inventions of people like Professor Harper of Heriot-Watt, whose case I brought to the attention of the Department? I hope that the Minister will say something about what "help" and "encouragement"—to use words in the letter of the Secretary of State—can be given to the Kuwaiti British Fire Group.

Thirdly, in the presence of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—indeed, in the presence of any Minister—I should say that I quite sure that the service men who have to deal with the mines and the unexploded shells have a most thankless and dangerous task. Of course, the booby traps have to be removed. I should like to pay tribute to the two *Financial Times* journalists who lost their lives in the course of their reporting duty. The *Financial Times* has reported these events with great distinction. The truth is that in that area one cannot walk off tarmacadam—indeed, even off fresh tyre tracks. We should all like to see detectors of non-metallic mines invented.

I want to ask about tunnelling, about the construction of culverts. Is the operation still short of bulldozers? In a written reply of 13 May, the Minister of State said:

> "Face masks are available to these personnel and they are advised to avoid strenuous activity when in areas suffering heavy air pollution."

Are face masks available to people other than key personnel? My understanding is that more ought to be available.

I want to ask also about world weather, about the climatic effect. Areas from [illegible] to China are affected. What is the Government's view on what Dr. Houghton and Dr. Browning, those distinguished scientists of the Meteorological Office, are now saying? I do not think that I break Chatham house rules—the gentleman has said this elsewhere—when I say that Professor Akbar Ahmed, professor of arabic studies at Cambridge, said that his relations in Quetta, in Baluchistan, were now affected by what was happening in Kuwait.

I also ask, is there not a reasonable chain of cause and effect which we should investigate and which may link Kuwaiti oil fires to the cyclone in Bangladesh? That link will be difficult to prove or disprove, but if the Kuwaiti oil fires have caused or are causing the unusual weather in the Bay of Bengal, they must be quenched as soon as possible and for the additional reason of the sake of humanity.

The argument is, briefly, that, due to the rotation of the earth, the general wind pattern is a westerly air stream from Kuwait towards India and Bengal. There is already evidence that the Himalayan snows have been darkened by Kuwaiti oil smoke. About 100 million tonnes of oil a year is burnt in Kuwait, but it is burnt inefficiently and probably 1 per cent. appears as soot. Kuwaiti crude typically contains 4 per cent. sulphur. The sulphur oxide —SO_2—is an absorber of sunlight. It changes to SO_3 and then to SO_4, which is sulphuric acid. That mechanism is believed to have caused the type of cold that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs.

The concept of a nuclear winter suggests that dust clouds from atomic bombs rising to the upper atmosphere could produce permanent climatic change. The oil fires in Kuwait are producing soot on the scale of an atomic war. Carbon dioxide—CO_2—and the direct heat are unlikely to be so important. However, cyclones are instabilities between bodies of air at differing temperatures. Warm air trapped below cold air can rise and rotate to produce high winds, rain and high tides. In Bangladesh, the coastal cyclones are usually most devastating in the autumn, but this is an early cyclone and one has to ask whether it will be followed by others. Those people who opted for war have an obligation to put as much effort into the ecological battle as they did into Desert Storm. It is up to the Government to persuade us that that is being done.

I suppose that it is tempting for people to attribute the unprecedented disaster merely to the wickedness of Saddam Hussein. Neither I nor my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is present, is under any misapprehension about Saddam Hussein, but we and 32 others thought that the war option was the wrong way to tackle the problem. To prevent the answer that the disaster is merely the fault of Saddam Hussein, I report what I heard at a Kingston Labour party meeting last week. An Iraqi from Basra—a Shia whose family had suffered terribly from the Sunnis—said that if, every day, for 36 days as much explosive as was used on Hiroshima is used against one's country, vengeance and irrationality take over and people detonate oil wells.

The purpose of the debate is to ask the constructive question, "What on earth can be done about it now?"

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for initiating this Adjournment debate. The grim situation in Kuwait has not disappeared from the public mind in Britain or in the rest of the world.

The scale of Saddam Hussein's vandalism is vast. In addition to the oil fires, serious damage has been deliberately targeted at key oil and gas establishments. Saddam Hussein and his destruction squads deliberately set out to destroy the wells and thus delay Kuwait's ability to produce oil and processed products in refineries, at petrochemical plants and power stations. Saddam Hussein ordered the systematic mining and booby-trapping of the surroundings of the blazing oil wells. That ordnance must be cleared before well control work commences. Shifting sands and lakes of oil cover unexploded mines. All this makes it difficult to estimate how long restoration work will take.

In responding to this man-made disaster, the Government are continuing the commitment that they made, with the other allies, to free Kuwait through Operation Desert Storm. The allies responded then to the Kuwaitis' appeal for help against Iraqi aggression. The Gulf oil fires are a deplorable consequence of that

aggression, and the Kuwaitis have again appealed to the international community for assistance. I hope to persuade the hon. Gentleman that the commitment to help Kuwait now is just as strong.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are offering the Kuwaitis help to tackle the fires and block off the flows of oil. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took a strong lead with his early visit to Kuwait soon after the liberation of that country, with direct offers of help to the Crown Prince. This has been followed up with a visit by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is currently in Kuwait. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy took the latest mission of business men to Kuwait on 26 April 1991 to give United Kingdom proposals his personal backing, and he is confident that British companies will obtain major contracts.

Bringing the fires under control is taking much longer than any of us would like. However, I think that we are all aware that the oil industry has never had to face a disaster on such a scale with, initially, more than 600 burning or leaking oil wells. Many methods have to be used—and, indeed, new ones developed—to bring the tragedy to a close as soon as possible.

The Kuwait authorities, in the first instance, have relied on the historically successful well control companies from North America, such as Red Adair and Boots and Coots, to fight the oil well fires. We can all understand why the Kuwaitis did that. There has been no opportunity to develop a significant UK capability because of the very low number of blow-outs and fires in the UK compared with North America. However, there are so many wild wells in Kuwait that the Kuwaitis have appealed for international help, and British companies have seen an opportunity to develop their technology and experience.

It is in response to that appeal that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy led the business mission to Kuwait last month, and I am very pleased to report that British companies are now getting major contracts. Indeed, the Kuwaiti British Fire Group, a consortium including AMEC, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey, has led the way with an announcement today of receipt of a letter of intent for a major contract to tackle the oil well fires.

The KBFG has to mobilise its team in Kuwait within three days of agreement of the final contract conditions and funding arrangements, and then it has a further 21 days to assess damage to the wells and produce a detailed report to the Kuwait Oil company. It is hoped to begin the practical process of extinguishing fires once its survey and report are complete and agreement has been reached with Kuwait Oil on a plan of action. The survey will give the KBFG the opportunity to examine in detail each individual well and decide upon the best method of extinguishing the fires and controlling the oil flow. In addition to traditional means of well capping and relief well drilling, it is considering a number of innovative alternative techniques, in liaison with Kuwait Oil.

The KBFG will be sending out a field team of 18 to undertake the initial survey work. When the survey is completed it will be in a better position to assess the overall numbers of people required for the oilfield rehabilitation project. In addition to the enormous resource base offered by AMEC, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey, the KBFG will draw on the resources of other international companies such as BP for technical support, Royal Ordnance for its skills in dealing with explosives and mine clearance, and others. The KBFG is equally supported by AMEC, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey with a three-man executive board co-ordinating the project. The project's second phase is expected to be worth many millions of dollars.

The KBFG survey will be based just north of Kuwait, close to the Sabriyah oil field. However, as part of the survey it will assess the most suitable site for a large-scale encampment that best facilitates the oil field rehabilitation programme. This contract is good news all round—good news for the Kuwaitis as they fight to control the fires, good news for the KBFG consortium, and good news for other British companies bidding to offer help to Kuwait. I am sure hon. Members will join me in wishing the Kuwaitis and KBFG every success.

AMEC, one of the KBFG partners, has also been involved with Biwater Ltd. in the refurbishment of the old British Army married quarters at Fahaleel, south of Kuwait City. This base will provide accommodation to attract mainly British firms and their staff. Two hundred beds in single rooms are becoming available at the aptly named BRIT camp—short for British reconstruction implementation team. Both the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Engineers have been involved in making the campsite safe and providing it with transport facilities. Full information on the camp has been sent to 370 companies which have expressed a written interest.

Of course, the KBFG contract comes only a month after Royal Ordnance obtained a major contract from the Kuwait Ministry of Defence for battle area and explosive dump clearance. The contract covers a large proportion of Kuwait, both around population centres and around oil wells. Clearance of the war zones will allow the environmental clean-up to proceed safely. This was "contract No. 1", as the Kuwaitis term it—the first signed with a British company. The KBFG's is the second. The substantial Royal Ordnance contract will go well into 1992. It is another concrete example of the support that British firms are giving to Kuwait, continued today by the KBFG.

Another example of United Kingdom assistance to the Kuwaitis, and one in which, I know, the hon. Member for Linlithgow has taken great interest, is the involvement of the Royal Engineers in dealing with the aftermath of the invasion. The engineers have had no direct involvement in fighting oil fires, but assistance and advice has been provided on the disposal of unexploded ordnance by Royal Engineers personnel in Kuwait. In addition, the Royal Engineers have given safety briefings and have produced maps showing danger areas and leaflets giving safety advice. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Royal Engineers do not have any equipment specifically designed to extinguish oil fires. Nor are Royal Engineers personnel trained in the very specialised techniques required. However, they have standard equipment—for example, bulldozers, cranes and fork lift trucks—which can be of some use.

Similarly, short-notice but none the less invaluable assistance has been provided in the restoration of power to the Kuwaitis, when a combination of British service men and British Electricity International were involved.

On the question of health, I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman was keen to receive a Government view on the health risks associated with the indigenous Kuwaiti population as well of those expatriates directly involved in trying to extinguish the dreadful oil well fires. On 9 May,

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

the hon. Gentleman draw that matter to the attention of the Leader of the House and today I have obtained information which I hope will be of assistance to the hon. Gentleman.

I am advised by the Department of Health that close to burning oil wells, high concentrations of toxic irritants, including smoke, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide, will be produced. They may present serious problems to those involved in fire fighting operations.

The smoke is likely to be an irritant, although its activity in this regard will depend on its exact composition. Simple masks will reduce the amount of smoke inhaled. Because crude oil is burning, the presence of organic compounds, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons as the hon. Gentleman said, should be anticipated. However, possible carcinogenic effects would be related to long-term cumulative exposures; short intermittent exposures from the fires would not be expected to add perceptibly to such risks, and would be negligible compared with risks of burns, explosions or traumatic injury while actually fire fighting.

Exposure to carbon monoxide in the smoke plume could lead to fatigue and some impairment of performance of the tasks in hand, but in the open-air conditions of the fires, exposures are unlikely to be sufficient to cause concern.

Whilst I do not have all the details, I am advised that sulphur dioxide is an irritant and in high concentrations may trigger an attack of bronchospasm in asthmatic people. Asthmatic attacks may be precipitated at sulphur dioxide concentration of about 2,500 mcg per cu m. Asthmatics who develop an attack as a result of exposure would require medical treatment. Some non-asthmatics could experience airway irritation and coughing. Peak sulphur dioxide concentrations of 2,700 mcg per cu m have been measured in the plume 100 km downwind from the source. If this information is reliable, concentration closer to the source could be higher than that, and people in that area could be exposed to high concentrations of sulphur dioxide.

Some oil wells which were blown up but not burning were reported to be producing large quantities of hydrogen sulphide. That is a very toxic gas and every effort should be made to eliminate exposure to it. At low concentrations, the characteristic smell of rotten eggs and the accompanying eye irritation will be noticed. Higher concentrations cause loss of the sense of smell and pulmonary damage, and damage to the nervous system may follow rapidly. This problem has been dealt with by setting such remaining wells alight. Although it is highly odorous and has acute toxic properties, hydrogen sulphide has not been reported to have carcinogenic effects.

Further away from the fires, the concentrations of smoke and toxic gases will fall but, as yet, no clear information on actual ground level concentrations has appeared. It seems unlikely from what is known that there will be long-term effects, but in the absence of satisfactory data we cannot be certain of this; nor is it possible, therefore, to make any definitive statement.

Although there have been theoretical levels of ozone and nitrogen dioxide at ground level of the order of 200 to 300 parts per billion measurements in the plume have been substantially lower. Concentrations of below 300 parts per billion of ozone or nitrogen dioxide do not pose a major danger to health, although some individuals taking exercise out of doors may experience coughing and discomfort on taking deep breath. Effects may be limited by reducing exposure and limiting exercise out of doors.

Experts currently in the area should be well aware of those problems and should have the necessary protective equipment, including closed-circuit breathing apparatus for use if circumstances demand it.

I hope that the hon. Member for Linlithgow will agree that this comprehensive statement will be helpful in responding to him.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the important question of the environmental effects of the Gulf crisis. I know that he and Dr. Nigel Downing, the distinguished maritime biologist, met my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to discuss his concerns about the effect of oil spills and the Iraqi occupation of coral islands in the north of the Gulf. My hon. Friend accepted the importance of the islands and summarised the help that the Department of the Environment have been able to offer Dr. Downing, such as assistance with flights and contacts in the Gulf states.

I am aware also that the Kuwaitis are concerned about the threat to animal life from the smoke plume. Both the Saudi National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development and our own natural history museum have taken an interest in the environmental problems in Kuwait, in particular the case of the offshore coral islands in the Gulf. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to provide Dr. Downing and other environmental authorities with any assistance that his Department can provide.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow mentioned Bechtel, which is a large establishment with a strong commitment to the United Kingdom. It employs 1,200 staff, 600 of whom are employed abroad, and its responsibilities include the middle east. About 100 of its staff were held hostage in Iraq, where it had a contract, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Before the land war started for the liberation of Kuwait, the London office of the Kuwait Oil Company invited Bechtel to provide a back-up service of fire-fighting teams from north America, which were to be employed by KOC directly. Bechtel have, therefore, been responsible for all the support services required, including the provision of water, construction plant, vehicles, accommodation and personnel. After a slow start, which was understandable given the conditions prevailing in the aftermath of war, and the regrettably well targeted Iraqi sabotage, steady progress has been made, with some 90 wells extinguished and capped. Water supplies are now reported to be adequate to support the fire- fighting teams. I understand that Bechtel now has in Kuwait 200 staff controlled from its London office, with a further 100 expected soon.

The Kuwaiti authorities understandably want to extinguish and cap more wells more quickly and have invited groups other than the north American fire fighters to supplement their needs. I am pleased to note that there is British involvement, once again, with the British Kuwait Fire Group offering a turnkey contract. I welcome all efforts from the United Kingdom to assist Kuwait to overcome its problems.

I revert to my earlier comments on our overall reconstruction programme. There is no doubt that our performance has made a good impression on the Kuwaitis.

I shall respond to the meteorological issues raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow as soon as possible in writing.

This country played a vital role in the liberation of Kuwait from the terror of Saddam Hussein, a terror which has left its environmental scar on that nation. We shall continue to play a leading role in the reconstruction of Kuwait, and can be justly proud of our efforts so far.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister for that serious answer. He has answered my questions in the spirit in which they were asked last week.

On the issue of the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, is he prepared to give me the evidence of Sir Donald Acheson that short-term exposure may not have deleterious effects? I will not challenge the chief medical officer on his own ground but I should be more than curious to ascertain what evidence the Minister is relying on.

Mr. Moynihan: As the hon. Gentleman knows, not being a Minister in that Department, I went to considerable lengths to ensure that my Department could deliver as comprehensive a statement as possible today. However, that point will not be lost on the Department of Health. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to put the question to my colleagues in that Department, they will clearly have a responsibility to reply.

Mr. Dalyell: The impression created by the Minister's reply is that there is still a great deal to be done on the provision of some not very sophisticated equipment, and that time may not be on our side. As I understand it, the sheer heat generated makes it more and more difficult, not least with the change in the weather, to tackle the number of oil wells that we should. Is the Minister satisfied that all the equipment, even that which is unsophisticated, is being sent out as soon as it can be?

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Motion made,

That, with effect from the beginning of the next Session of Parliament, the following Standing Order be made:

'27A.—(1) Subject to paragraph (8) below, in the case of a Bill authorising the carrying out of works the nature and extent of which are specified in the Bill on land so specified, there shall be deposited on or before 4th December in the Private Bill Office and at the Public Departments at which copies of the Bill are required to be deposited under Standing Order 39, either

(a) a copy or copies (as specified by paragraph (2) below) of an environmental statement containing, in relation to the works authorised by the Bill, the information set out in Schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (referred to below as "Schedule 3") or such of that information as the Secretary of State may in any particular case direct, or

(b) a copy or copies (as so specified) of a direction by the Secretary of State that no such statement is necessary in relation to the works authorised by the Bill.

(2) The number of copies required to be deposited under paragraph (1)(a) or (b) above shall be three in the case of a deposit at the Department of the Environment and one in any other case.

(3) Where any such works authorised by a Bill relate to two or more distinct projects each project may be treated separately for the purposes of paragraph (1) above; and the references in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of that paragraph to the works authorised by the Bill shall accordingly be construed, where the paragraph applies separately to each project as references to the works comprised in that project.

(4) Notwithstanding any direction given as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, any environmental statement of which copies are deposited under this Order shall contain the summary (referred to below as "the non-technical summary") required by paragraph (2)(e) and, where material, paragraph 4 of Schedule 3.

(5) Where the Secretary of State has given a direction as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, a copy of the direction shall be deposited with every copy of the environmental statement deposited under this Order; and every copy of a direction so deposited or deposited under paragraph (1)(b) above shall be accompanied by a statement by the Secretary of State of his reasons for giving the direction.

(6) Copies of every environmental statement deposited under this Order shall be made available for inspection, and for sale at a reasonable price, on and after 4th December, at the offices at which copies of the Bill are required to be made available under Standing Order 4A; and there shall also be made available separately on and after that date at those offices, for inspection and for sale at a reasonable price, copies of the non-technical summary.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Monday 20 May at Seven o'clock.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (HARBOURS) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Highland Regional Council (Harbours); and the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered on Tuesday 21 May and to be printed. [Bill 158.]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Right to Buy

1. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's right-to-buy housing policy in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Since 1979, more than 217,000 public sector houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland under the right-to-buy legislation. This has helped to raise the proportion of owner-occupiers in Scotland from around 35 to over 51 per cent. Through the right to buy, the Government are successfully meeting the aspirations of Scottish people to own their homes.

Mr. Mitchell: As those figures show clearly the great success of the right-to-buy scheme in Scotland at spreading ownership, choice and opportunity, will my hon. Friend confirm that the rent-to-mortgage scheme is similarly popular? Does he expect that, as with the right-to-buy scheme, Labour Members will have to eat their words about the rent-to-mortgage scheme?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Some 20,000 people have expressed interest in the rent-to-mortgage scheme, which caters for a different market from the right-to-buy scheme. I believe that it will be extremely popular. Moreover, for every 1,000 sales, it will bring in approximately £8 million to the local authorities concerned which they can spend on public sector housing, so they are strongly encouraged to take up that opportunity and give assistance.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Will the Minister extend his enthusiasm for tenants' rights to the tenants of Scottish new towns and give them the right to choose their district council as landlord? I hope that the Minister will not say that it is a matter for his hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State, because Governments have collective responsibility.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No options are ruled out in that connection. We are considering the submission on behalf of new town tenants and shall come to a conclusion in due course. I enjoyed my visit to the hon. Gentleman's district council, where rapid progress is being made, and I look forward to its continuing.

Mr. Sillars: Will the Minister confirm that, out of the 20,000 expressions of interest in the rent-to-mortgage scheme, only 118 people are applying to buy their own homes? Will he also confirm that his Department's expenditure on advertising and administration for those 118 houses is £275,000? Is he aware that that compares with the mere £280,000 available for new start capital works for 14,500 houses in the Moss Park area of Govan? When will he get his priorities right?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is extremely important that tenants should be carefully and professionally counselled before they take that step and that process is under way. Naturally, it will start gradually, as it did under the right-to-buy scheme. If the hon. Gentleman wants more funds to be spent on Moss Park, I suggest that he makes representations to Glasgow district council to speed up the processing of council house sales, which takes about a year, and ensure that the period is reduced to six months. If he does, millions of pounds could be saved for spending on his constituents and on public sector housing stock in Glasgow.

Scottish TUC

2. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests he has had for a meeting with the Scottish Trades Union Congress since he became Secretary of State; and what has been his response.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): My right hon. Friend has received one such request and has indicated his willingness to meet the STUC at a suitable opportunity. I myself met the general council of the STUC on 15 February for a general discussion on the Scottish economy.

Mr. Eadie: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for that reply, but it is not consistent with the information that I have received, which is that the Secretary of State refused to meet the STUC to discuss reopening Monktonhall colliery. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that yesterday a lobby of thousands of miners and other interested people presented to No. 10 Downing street petitions requesting that Monktonhall colliery in my constituency be reopened? In the light of the hon. Gentleman's answer, the apparent confusion in the Scottish Office and all that we heard from the Secretary of State for Scotland at the Conservative party conference in Perth, which was nothing but rhetoric, will the STUC be driven to ask for a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the perilous state of the Scottish economy?

Mr. Stewart: Decisions on the future of individual pits are a matter for British Coal. The corporation is permitted to review the position of Monktonhall in mid-1991. I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that my right hon. Friend has agreed to meet the STUC for a general discussion, following its congress. That meeting will take place.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend meets the STUC, will he draw its attention to the responsible way in which the shop stewards at Rosyth naval base have lobbied for their base and contrast that with the way in which the Transport and General Workers Union behaved over Ford in Dundee? The STUC, with its socialist and nationalist attitude, is opposed to directors representing trade unions in our finest Scottish companies.

Mr. Stewart: I understand my hon. Friend's latter point, but I do not think that I should intrude on the internal grief of the STUC. As for Ford at Dundee, while my hon. Friend's criticism of the Transport and General Workers Union is correct, it is worth putting on the record the fact that the Amalgamated Engineering Union did its best to achieve that major project for Scotland. I echo what my hon. Friend said about the shop stewards at Rosyth, whom, I, with a large number of hon. Members, have met.

Mr. Galbraith: When the Secretary of State finally meets the STUC, will he discuss opt-out hospitals—a matter on which its affiliates must be consulted? Will he explain why yesterday in the House the Prime Minister said that decisions on opting out should be made by "medical people"? Is the Secretary of State aware that in Scotland more than 80 per cent. of medical people—the doctors—voted against opting out? Why does the Secretary of State, in the Prime Minister's words, have "so little faith" in the doctors? Why does not the Secretary of state, even at this late stage, listen to the doctors and stop the opting-out nonsense?

Mr. Stewart: The Ayrshire NHS trust is led by a consultant. When I saw the first 25 questions on the Order Paper, I came to the conclusion that the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and his collegues were running scared of my hon. Friend the Minister of State because there was not a single question on education or health.

I can assure the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has agreed to meet the STUC on that matter.

Scottish Fishermen's Federation

3. **Mr. Buchanan-Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met office-bearers of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation; if decommissioning was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 23 April in London and, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on 10 May in Perth, when a number of fisheries issues, including decommissioning, were discussed.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for having arranged the meeting between the fishermen's leaders and the Prime Minister in Perth last Friday, which was greatly appreciated. Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that decommissioning is an effective conservation measure which takes vessels out of the fleet and thereby reduces fishing efforts? What advice would he give to the fishermen's leaders about what further evidence or information he requires from them to persuade his colleagues of the justice of the case which the fishermen and others have been making for many months?

Mr. Lang: I certainly acknowledge the consistency with which my right hon. Friend has advanced the case and the great importance that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation attaches to it. My discussions with the federation were useful and I was able to put the point that while decommissioning reduces capacity, it does not necessarily reduce effort. It is the reduction of effort which is most important. I have told the federation that if it cared to introduce a package of proposals in which decommissioning was a component I should be willing to consider it.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Secretary of State aware of the mounting evidence that the eight-day tie-up scheme is being administered with extreme harshness, not with the flexibility that was promised when it was announced? There is much confusion about the view of the Scottish Office and the Government on decommissioning. Would it not be better if the Secretary of State commissioned an independent study by experts in fishing and economics to have a clear look at the matter? That would avoid the prospect of the Secretary of State, simply because he thinks that events may affect his political future, saying that he will consider the matter, while the Government resist on every occasion. Why cannot there be an independent assessment? The case could be proved without a shadow of doubt. We could then have a decommissioning scheme and honour would be saved, too.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that the eight-day tie-up arrangements are subject to conditions set down in a European regulation and are not at the discretion of the Government. To the extent that we have discretion in the matter, the tie-up arrangements are being applied as flexibly as is compatible with the important need to conserve stocks. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the most important criterion in the whole exercise is the need to conserve stocks, especially of cod and haddock, so that there will be fish for future generations of fishermen.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does not the Secretary of State accept, however, that other European countries are implementing effective Government-backed decommissioning schemes to enable skippers and owners who want to leave the North sea fishery to do so? Is he also aware that other European Governments are implementing effective compensation for the tie-up period and social security schemes for people who work on boats but are not skippers or owners? Why are the interests of crewmen in this country being prejudiced, when they operate a fisheries policy common to European Community? Why are they not getting the same benefits as are available in other countries?

Mr. Lang: Decommissioning schemes are in operation in other countries, but that does not exempt them from the need to apply other conservation measures as well, including the eight-day tie-up. If the Scottish Fishermen's Federation produced a package of proposals including a decommissioning component—perhaps funded to some extent by the industry—we should be willing to consider it. Our overriding priority is to ensure the conservation of stocks so that fish are there for the future.

Mr. Doran: Is the Secretary of State aware that, as well as the crisis in the fish catching side of the industry, a tragedy is taking place in the processing side of the industry, with businesses closing down on a regular basis? A dangerous situation is developing. In the north-east of Scotland we shall lose a large proportion of our fish processing industry. Is the Secretary of State aware that when fish processors recently made representations to the Scottish Office, they were rebuffed? There was no sign of sympathy whatsoever. What are the Secretary of State's proposals to assist fish processors through this difficult and dangerous time?

Mr. Lang: Of course, I appreciate the knock-on effects on the fish processing industry, but other options are open to fish processors, such as diversifying into other stocks and importing stocks. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have secured for the industry European Community grant aid of about £15 million for 1991-93. That will be of considerable value to the industry in modernising its premises and processing capacity.

Local Government

4. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the restructuring of local government; and what consultations he proposes to hold.

16. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had about the future structure of local government in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: We intend to consult widely on the future structure of local government in Scotland. A range of representations has already been received. I have already held discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and a further meeting will take place shortly.

Sir David Steel: Will the Secretary of State admit that among the representations that he received were considerable expressions of regret that he had not seen fit to appoint an independent commission to review the structure of local government, as is being done in England? Does he accept that a further advantage, apart from the Government's not being able to rig the system, would be that the commission's report would be ready in time for the Scottish parliament to legislate on the matter?

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Gentleman anticipates one or two matters. If in the consultations there are extensive representations on the need for a commission, I shall consider them in the same way as I shall consider all other representations. The right hon. Gentleman should be under no illusions about what is taking place in England. There is no royal commission as was suggested. It is an advisory commission which replaces the Local Government Boundary Commission. Scotland is not engaged in a gradual area-by-area rolling process against a background of greater scale and greater diversity, such as exists in England. Ours is a more coherent and comprehensible system of local government and it should be possible to move with relative ease to single-tier all-purpose authorities. If there is a relevant role for the Local Government Boundary Commission in our deliberations, we shall consider that as well.

Mrs. Adams: The Secretary of State must answer the question. Why is it necessary for a commission to say what the structure of local government in England and Wales should be while the Tory party, which does not have the confidence of the Scottish people, can define on the back of an envelope the structure of local government in Scotland? Did the Secretary of State support within Cabinet a commission for England and Wales and once more fail miserably to win the same concession for Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady is wrong. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales does not contemplate such a commission for Wales, because the situation there is different from that in England. I intend to have extremely wide consultations in Scotland. We are contemplating two consultation papers, not one, and we plan to consult over a reasonable period so that there will be every opportunity for full representations to be made to us. We intend to move forward with general agreement and support to achieve a lasting solution that will be relevant to the needs of all the different parts of Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my right hon. Friend say something about the time scale for consultation, legislation and the implementation of his policy? Will he bear in mind the fact that what may be sensible for the central belt may not be suitable for rural Scotland? There could be a great deal to be said for returning to the old county boundaries, which proved very satisfactory over the previous century.

Mr. Lang: On the time scale, I assure my hon. Friend that we hope to publish our first consultation paper within the next few weeks. We shall consult on that during the summer with a view to publishing a further consultation paper in the autumn. Legislation might reasonably be contemplated in 1993-94, with a new system coming into place in 1996. I emphasise that those times are not fixed; they are general objectives. I certainly agree that we should not seek to impose right across Scotland a system that might not suit the variations in geography and demography and in local loyalties. I have not lost sight of my hon. Friend's important point about loyalties to the old county councils.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State accept that if the local government map is a Tory in-house job there is a danger that it will command no confidence because it will be seen as a partisan exercise? I take some encouragement from the right hon. Gentleman's initial answer, which suggested that the door is not entirely shut on independent advice. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which, I think, speaks for councils of every political colour and, of course, all three main Opposition parties in the House are in favour of an independent commission to set the parameters of debate and to make recommendations. In recent times we have had the Wheatley commission, the Stodart report and the Montgomery committee report. Why have those sensible precedents been departed from and why is such independent advice not considered necessary, at least initially, in this case? Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that it would be wise to heed that argument as all the evidence suggests that although he may start the process of change, a Labour Government will take the final decision?

Mr. Lang: It seems that the hon. Gentleman is the only Opposition Member who is seized of that opinion. I agree that the Stodart committee and others in the area of local government in the past 20 or 30 years have set valuable precedents and carried out much work. The information that they gathered makes our task easier. I take it from the hon. Gentleman's reference to the importance of an independent commission that he would set up such a commission before drawing up any plans to create a Scottish assembly.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that throughout Scotland there is a mood for single-tier, all-purpose authorities which has been brought about because the public have never comprehended which services were provided by which council? Consequently, Members of Parliament have frequently had to deal with council matters because of difficulties that the public have had to face. That is what we are now offering.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are seeking to achieve a new and durable system of local government for Scotland that will be efficient and popular and will increase the accountability of local authorities to

their residents. It should remove duplication, conflict and bureaucracy and make for better and stronger local government.

Child Abuse

5. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow of 26 April, *Official Report*, columns *618-19*, if it is his intention to introduce legislative provisions akin to those contained in part III of the Criminal Justice Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The provisions in the Bill have been designed specifically for England and Wales. We need to consider separately what is most suitable for Scotland and in particular the Scottish Law Commission's recommendations in its report on the evidence of children and other potentially vulnerable witnesses.

Dr. Godman: Part III of the Criminal Justice Bill and the English Children Act 1989 show all too plainly the disturbing discrepancy between English and Scottish child care law. Given that discrepancy and the recent and continuing inquiries into abuses of children, has not the time arrived for a Minister of State at the Scottish Office to be given specific responsibility for child protection? Should not his first duty be to initiate a critical and tough-minded examination of child care law and practices? We can trust social work departments, but these worrying developments need a Minister of State to carry out such duties.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have a Minister of State who has promised a White Paper on the subject. A report on child care law was published last October and we have received extensive comments on its recommendations. On 19 April, my right hon. Friend announced his intention to establish a judicial inquiry following the recent child protection cases in the Orkneys. We will take into account its findings in preparing the White Paper, which will set out a coherent package of measures to improve and simplify arrangements for the protection and support of children in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman will know that changes have been made to the legislation, because he proposed them. Following consultation with the judiciary, the new procedures in courts will be introduced in Edinburgh and Glasgow later this year. They will be carefully monitored with a view to reducing stress on child witnesses. We will review the practice and, if necessary, legislate further in the light of experience.

Mr. Wallace: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his prompt response to the calls for a judicial inquiry into the events in Orkney. He will agree that we look to that inquiry to come forward with positive proposals to improve child care law. Does he accept that the inquiry will be more effective and better informed if the parents involved have adequate funding for proper legal representation? Can the Minister make a statement on that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have written fully to the hon. Member on the subject of legal aid. I understand that the immediate problem has been resolved, but if there are further matters I shall be happy to meet the hon. Members to discuss them in detail and to follow them up.

Council Tax

6. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to change the number of bands upon which the Government's new council tax is to be based.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend will be considering carefully the responses to the consultation paper on the new tax. Those responses will no doubt cover the question of the number of bands needed. We do not, however, at this stage envisage a change from the proposed seven band system.

Mr. Home Robertson: This story is going to run and run. How can the Government justify prolonging the agony of the poll tax for a further chaotic two years or, as is probably more likely, for three years while they try to stitch up all those bands? If the Minister is seriously interested in fairness in local government taxation, will he concede that Lothian region is a moderate-spending local authority, which has been compelled to levy a very high poll tax because it gets £88·68 less per head in grant from the Scottish Office than the Scottish average? Can we have fair banding for revenue support grant this year, instead of capping Lothian's eminently responsible and reasonable budget?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member knows perfectly well what the situation is in respect of Lothian region. My right hon. Friend has agreed to meet the regional council if it wishes to make representations to him. As regards the more general question about banding, I think that the whole House will appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable about very big houses, but I hope that he will be reassured by the fact that owners in the top band will pay about two and half times the amount that owners of properties in the smallest band will pay, and that is perfectly fair. The Government have taken major action to reduce the burden of the community charge in Scotland, as in England and Wales, in the light of the quite outrageous increases imposed by many Labour councils.

Mr. Douglas: Before the Minister contemplates looking at any new tax, will he take some time to examine what is happening to local authorities because of the poll tax? Will he consider introducing legislation—we do not have much legislation in Scottish terms—to take out the 20 per cent. rule and eliminate the arresting of benefits, especially those involving social security? Will he do that and get rid of this arduous and hazardous impost on the people of Scotland?

Mr. Stewart: The House has debated that matter and has taken a decision. As regards collection, if the figures being alleged by the local authorities are correct, it is obviously sensible for them to concentrate first on getting the community charge collected from those who are liable for the full payment.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: In the light of experience with the community charge, will my hon. Friend keep his two major objectives—first, simplicity in relation to the new tax, and secondly, low costs of administration and

collection? If both those are achieved, there will be better understanding among taxpayers and, as a result, better accountability from local authorities.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend makes two valid points. The council tax will, of course, be simpler and will have lower costs of collection than the community charge system.

Mr. Maxton: When will the Minister acknowledge that the disastrous poll tax, of which he was such a loyal supporter until he was told to change his mind, has created an enormous financial crisis for local government and for the many poor people in Scotland? As a result of that crisis, immediate action is demanded—not long consultations about some new tax in the future. In view of that fact, and of the light legislative load, why do not the Government abolish the 20 per cent. rule now and introduce legislation, which will have our full support, to return to the old rating system on 1 April 1992? Thereafter, if he wants to change it, it will be a matter for him and the Government, if they are still in power.

Mr. Stewart: When will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the community charge system was brought in because the domestic rating system was patently unfair, patently unjust and patently did not have the confidence of the people of Scotland? When will he acknowledge that that is precisely the system that he and his colleagues wish to bring back and to enforce on the people of Scotland? It was completely unworkable before.

Tourism

7. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the effect of the increased tax on petrol on the tourist industry in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The increase in petrol duty introduced by the Budget is not likely to have a significant effect on the Scottish tourist industry.

Sir Russell Johnston: It is self-evident that St. Andrew's house is hardly a hotbed of innovative thinking if that is the best that the Minister can come up with. Is he aware that 64 per cent. of all tourists who visited Scotland in 1989 from within the United Kingdom and half of the foreign tourists came by car? Is he seriously telling me that an increase of 13p per gallon will have no effect at all on tourism? Surely St. Andrew's house ought to be considering differential pricing to aid the tourist industry. Some means of mitigating the effect of the increase ought to be found, or does the Minister regard the Chancellor as a blind axeman and feel that he can do nothing about it?

Mr. Stewart: St. Andrew's house is the source of some figures that will reassure the hon. Gentleman. In the United Kingdom, excise duty on unleaded petrol—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, like me, uses unleaded petrol—is 22·41p per litre, whereas in Spain it is 23·76, in France 29·70 and in Italy 36·07. If overseas visitors were to decide to take their holidays on the basis of the amount of excise duty they would have to pay they would obviously choose the United Kingdom.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my hon. Friend invite the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) to reflect on the fact that if there were a Scottish assembly with tax-raising powers, the cost of petrol, hotels and shopping in Scotland would be so appalling that nobody would come to Scotland at all?

Mr. Stewart: As always, my hon. and learned Friend has made an extremely good point. It is very fortunate for tourists and potential tourists in Scotland that there is no Scottish assembly; nor is there going to be one.

Mr. McAllion: What will be the effect on the tourist industry of last week's decision to turn down flat the management-employee bid at Strathtay Scottish bus company in Tayside and instead to accept the bid of a Yorkshire-based private concern that will guarantee the loss of employment and services in the Tayside area? Does the Minister not understand that the more he goes on selling out Scottish-based companies to the highest bidder, the greater will be the determination of the Scottish people to get rid of him and the Tory Government?

Mr. Stewart: What a load of nonsense the hon. Gentleman talks, and not for the first time. He ought to know that many of the management-employee buy-out proposals have been accepted in Scotland and that, under the system, management-employee buy-outs were given preference. That particular buy-out did not succeed, but others have.

Mr. Gregory: Does my hon. Friend agree that while the price of petrol will have an effect on tourism in Scotland, the fact that Scotland will not participate with the rest of the United Kingdom in a national tourism trade show must be the greatest disadvantage to the potential for tourism in Scotland? Will he put pressure on the director and board members of the Scottish tourist board to participate with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Stewart: I can reassure my hon. Friend and the House that both the Scottish tourist board and Highlands and Islands Enterprise continue to promote Scotland both at home and overseas. The campaigns are targeted at all key markets overseas, while at home the Scottish tourist board has joined the other national tourist boards in mounting a special tourist campaign to encourage more British tourists to have holidays at home. I can also reassure my hon. Friend that both the Scottish tourist board and Highlands and Islands Enterprise continue to devote considerable resources to the improvement of visitor facilities and amenities.

Scottish TUC

8. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the general council of the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss unemployment in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I have indicated my willingness to meet the general council of the STUC at a suitable opportunity. Employment and unemployment could no doubt be discussed at such a meeting.

Mr. Marshall: I appeal to the Secretary of State, before he meets the general council of the STUC, to read and consider the recent series of articles in the *Glasgow Evening Times* entitled

"The Age of the Dole",

part of which refers to the adult male level of 48 per cent. unemployment in Parkhead, North in my constituency,

the highest level of unemployment in Strathclyde. With unemployment rising rapidly, will the Secretary of State shake off his complacency, reverse his recent hard-hearted decision not to meet Glasgow Labour Members to discuss unemployment in the city and agree to meet us urgently?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will be well aware that unemployment in Glasgow has fallen by more than 40 per cent. in the past four years, a dramatic indication of the Government's policies. As to the *Glasgow Evening Times* series of articles, I can only assume that it is looking forward to the future of a possible Labour Government when, as a result of the Labour party's minimum wage, jobs would be lost, as a result of Labour's payroll tax, jobs would be lost, as a result of the Labour party's Scottish assembly tax, jobs would be lost, and as a result of the Labour party's proposals on industrial relations, jobs would be lost, just as they were under the last Labour Government.

Dr. Reid: The Secretary of State will be aware that one of the unemployment black spots that he might wish to discuss with the STUC is Lanarkshire. May I therefore, through him, offer cautious congratulations to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), on the Lanarkshire working party which has conducted its business with a speed and efficiency that were singularly lacking in regard to the Secretary of State's study on steel? Will he confirm that among the major projects being studied by the working party is a new national sports and football stadium for Scotland? Can he indicate when the working party is likely to report?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the compliments that he has paid to the working party, which I set up and which I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), the Minister responsible for industry, to supervise, a job which he did so effectively. We look forward to receiving the report of the working party quite soon and we shall react to it as quickly as we can. In the meantime, it would not be sensible for me to guess what may be in the report.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that employment in Scotland is at a very high level, that unemployment has increased very little compared with the rest of the United Kingdom and that the Scottish Enterprise announcement of £430 million to help employment in Scotland, plus the Prime Minister's announcement last week of £15 million for Lanarkshire, will go a long way to help overcome any difficulties caused by the recession?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. At £2·27 million the Scottish civilian work force in employment is at a historically high level. Over the past three years, the Scottish civilian work force has grown faster than the work force in Great Britain as a whole. Indeed, in the three years to December 1990 the Scottish civilian work force grew by 132,000. That is equivalent to 850 per week—a dramatic expansion.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State's silence following the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) mean that he is still refusing to meet the Glasgow Labour Members to discuss employment? Will he consider that in February, in the Government's public expenditure plans, he predicted that the number of adults entering employment training would fall this year from 47,000 to 30,000? Does he recall that on page 30 of "Serving Scotland's Needs" he claimed that this reflected

"the fact that, as a result of falling unemployment and improved labour market conditions, demand for Employment Training places continues to decline"?

As unemployment in Scotland has risen every month since then—a trend which is sadly and disastrously likely to continue—will he explain how he justifies the cuts?

Mr. Lang: With regard to the hon. Gentleman's request that I should meet the Glasgow Members, I shall certainly be happy to meet them to discuss employment and unemployment. As to the numbers joining training schemes, the hon. Gentleman will know that the number of young school leavers joining training schemes is estimated to fall by 4 per cent. this year. The number of long-term unemployed, for whom employment training is particularly designed, has fallen by 18 per cent. in the year to January 1991, a fall twice as fast in Scotland as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It is clearly sensible that such changes in the client group for the schemes should be reflected in their planning.

Mr. Oppenheim: How can we take Labour's protests about unemployment seriously when just over two years ago its union friends sold out workers in Dundee to keep the boys in Dagenham happy?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the people of Dundee and the people of Scotland will never forget the dramatic damage to Scotland's inward investment record as a result of the Labour party's activities and especially those of the trade union movement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are making rather slow progress. I now propose to proceed more rapidly than we have been doing.

USSR Markets

9. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's support for the Scottish and Glasgow business community and workers to open the markets of the Soviet republics and union to Scottish goods and services.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government provide a range of services to enable the business community to begin or expand their sales efforts in the Soviet Union. We are very happy to support efforts based on sound commercial judgment.

Mr. Wray: The Minister will be aware that Glasgow district council is concerned about export credit grants and about the Cabinet's decision possibly to introduce a Bill to privatise the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Are we to have a pathetic apology from the Minister for the state of the Department of Trade and Industry figures which show that in 1979 the total number of insolvencies was 344, but that at the end of 1990 there were 4,756?

Mr. Stewart: Questions on ECGD cover are properly the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who has to draw a balance

between providing support for project exports and the cost to the taxpayer of doing so. As for the efforts of Glasgow district council, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Government try to ensure that Scotland's efforts are properly co-ordinated. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not unwilling to grant consent for international trade promotion activities provided that he is satisfied that the proposals serve Scotland's needs.

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister assist me in giving advice to a constituent whom I shall be visiting tomorrow? A small business man who paid his value added tax returns four or five days late has been hammered with a £1,200 fine. Is that the type of hounding that we can expect from the Inland Revenue? Does that help the small business community?

Mr. Stewart: The relationship between the hon. Gentleman's question and trade with the Soviet Union escapes me, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to discuss a particular case with me or with the relevant Minister, he can do so.

Service Sector Employment

10. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what amount employment in the service sector increased in Scotland between 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Between June 1979 and June 1988, service sector employment in Scotland grew by 79,000. This was an increase of 6·4 per cent. The service sector makes an important contribution to Scotland's economy and in 1989 accounted for almost two thirds of our gross domestic product.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures that he has given illustrate how diversified and resilient the Scottish economy now is? It grew by 2·5 per cent. per year for the seven years to 1988, but by only 1 per cent. per year when Labour was in power. Does he also agree that the pundits who say that manufacturing has been overwhelmed by the service sector are wrong, because the likelihood is that manufacturing output will grow by 4 to 5 per cent. even this year?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right to point to the strength of the service sector in Scotland. Employment in banking, in insurance and in financial and business services increased by about 50 per cent. between 1979 and 1989. Last year total employment in Scotland grew—the only part of the United Kingdom in which that happened—and in the past three years employment in Scotland has risen faster than in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Council Tax

11. **Mr. MacDonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date he now expects the Government's new council tax to come into effect in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Our aim is that the new council tax should come into effect on 1 April 1993.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister forgot to say that growth in the service sector was slower in Scotland than virtually anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Can he confirm that tomorrow's unemployment figures will show that there are fewer jobs in Scotland now than there were in 1979?

Mr. Stewart: I cannot, of course, confirm or deny anything about tomorrow's unemployment figures. *[Interruption.]* Of course I cannot. I can, however, reassure the hon. Gentleman that according to every indicator—including last month's unemployment figures, employment indicators, business forecasts and independent economic forecasts—the Scottish economy is coming through the current economic downturn very much better than most other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Macdonald: Before the poll tax becomes history, will the Secretary of State finally clear up the confusion surrounding the liability of merchant seamen? Will he confirm that merchant seamen, who are away at sea for long periods, should not have to pay the poll tax while they are away, as they do not consume community services during those periods?

Mr. Lang: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but he will recognise that it is a matter not for me but for the community charge registration officer.

Mr. McKelvey: As the Secretary of State has abandoned all his previous thoughts about the poll tax, why does he find it necessary to continue to penalise those poor unfortunates who cannot afford to pay the 20 per cent. minimum?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that income support was increased to take account of the liability for the 20 per cent. minimum and also that one of reasons why people on low incomes are in difficulty with their poll tax is that they listened to Labour and Scottish National party Members who urged them not to pay their fair share of local government funding.

Highlands and Islands

12. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to discuss transport issues in the context of the development of the highlands and islands economy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to discuss transport issues, though he keeps in close touch with the development of the highlands and islands economy.

Mr. Wallace: A few moments ago, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), gave some comparative EC figures with regard to excise duty on petrol, but omitted to answer my hon. Friend's question about VAT. The Minister was a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs in 1982, when it recognised that one of the contributory factors to high petrol prices in rural areas is the mark-up that garage owners have to apply because of poor throughput. Does he accept that that is exacerbated by VAT and that the Government are benefiting from our disadvantage, and will he consider differential rates of VAT to assist rural areas such as the highlands and islands?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance for which he asks, but very substantial subsidies are paid, not least on the lifeline ferry services to the islands, from which the hon. Gentleman's constituents benefit. I have given the hon. Gentleman the assurance in the past that we will reconsider the subvention for the Shetlands in the light of the carryings of P and O, which will be of assistance. I am, of course, aware of the representations that the hon. Gentleman has received on that subject, which is relevant to his constituents, and the subsidies will be maintained.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does the Minister accept that, given the importance of transport issues in the highlands and islands of Scotland, it would be much more efficient to spend money on the infrastructure of our area rather than enabling the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive to spend £450 minimum on each test borehole for the disposal of nuclear waste? Is not that a case of the Government having their priorities totally wrong?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are to debate that subject tomorrow. With regard to the transport of nuclear waste, in almost 30 years of flask movement not one incident has occurred which has led to even the smallest amount of radioactivity being released. We are spending a considerable amount on the infrastructure of the highlands and we are funding the approach roads to the Skye bridge at a cost of some £6 million, which is a substantial contribution.

Mr. Wilson: Why does the Minister give us this line about Nirex? Does he recall being at the Dispatch Box two or three weeks ago, a week before the Secretary of State gave permission for 6,000 test bores in the highlands? Why did the Minister mislead the House—not deliberately, I am sure—on that occasion? Why was not the liaison between Scottish Office Ministers sufficient to ensure that we were told on that occasion that the Secretary of State would overrule what the Minister appeared to be telling the House? Will he confirm that if this goes ahead, there will be 15 train loads of radioactive material trundling through the highlands and much of the rest of Scotland every week? That is a type of highland transport that nobody wants. Will the Minister also comment on the crass hypocrisy of the Secretary of State, who in the early 1980s purported——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please withdraw the word "hypocrisy".

Mr. Wilson: I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Minister recall the early 1980s, when Mullwharchar was the issue? At that time the then hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) led us to believe that he would go to the wall to resist the drilling of nuclear test bores in that part of Scotland. Yet the same man, as Secretary of State for Scotland, has now overruled local democracy in the highlands and islands to enable such drilling to go ahead.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The decision that was announced was a quasi-judicial one. There was no prospect of the Secretary of State's issuing it before he was ready. In fact, it was not ready at that time. Of course, the accepted forms laid down in statute have to be followed. Effectively, that was done. We shall go into this matter very thoroughly in the debate tomorrow night. I shall expect to see the hon. Member present, and I shall answer fully all the points that he has raised. What I said in this House was totally consistent with the decision that was later announced.

Savage Dogs

13. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to protect police officers, postal workers and delivery personnel, from savage dogs kept by some householders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There is already a significant body of legislation dealing with dangerous dogs. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1989, passed with Government support, gives courts powers to impose very stiff penalties on those who do not keep their dogs under control.

Mr. Martin: The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is extremely concerned about the situation that is arising. Pit bull terriers and rottweilers are very numerous in many tenement properties and in some multi-storey flats. Tenants are terrified to go into some lifts, and parents do not like to send their children into the parks, where these animals are let loose. I understand that Strathclyde police officers have been injured because drug dealers are using these dogs as a front line of defence. Surely the Government should introduce legislation to outlaw breeds that are dangerous and have aggression bred into them.

Mr. Stewart: I am aware of the incidents to which the hon. Member refers and I find them as distressing and regrettable as I am sure the whole House does. However, it is not easy to see how such attacks could be prevented by legislative means. Specific controls over certain breeds would be far from straightforward. However, I should like to reassure the hon. Gentleman with regard to the legislation as it stands. Under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, it is an offence for any person to allow a creature in his charge, including a dog, to endanger another person who is in a public place, and the Act empowers a court to order the destruction of the creature.

Local Enterprise Companies

14. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of the local enterprise companies.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Progress in establishing the local enterprise companies in Scotland has been most encouraging. All are now fully operational, having signed operating contracts with Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Mr. Coombs: Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether the problem exists in Scotland, as it does in England, whereby a number of such new organisations are in danger of reinventing the wheel—that is to say, all tackling the same problems in different ways? Can my hon. Friend suggest to those organisations how they can ensure that best practice in the various tasks that they undertake is shared among them all?

Mr. Stewart: I cannot comment on whether English organisations are reinventing the wheel, but the Scottish system is different from that in England because it offers

true integration of training and economic development functions, which works extremely well. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise give general guidance to local enterprise companies. I have been impressed—as I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members have been—by the determination to ensure that the new system works effectively for the people of Scotland.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Nevertheless, has the Minister studied the report published today by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, which expresses the same misgivings as are held by voluntary organisations in Scotland—that local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils are failing to deal adequately with special needs groups? There is particular concern in respect of lost training places. While I am on my feet, may I welcome the recent announcement concerning inward investment for local enterprise companies in my constituency?

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute to Tayside Enterprise, whose announcement will be warmly welcomed by everyone on Tayside. As to the hon. Gentleman's specific question, people with special needs are given priority in youth and employment training. As I explained at Scottish Question Time last month, the new arrangements ensure that those with special needs are treated as a real priority.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has always been a rule of the Table Office—and understandably so—that it does not accept questions about the SAS. However, one read in this morning's newspapers that at a function organised by an Anglo-Israeli business man, Mr. Benjamin Pearl, the Prime Minister made a rather detailed speech about the operation of the special forces. If the Prime Minister can make speeches on sensitive matters, may we take it that Members of Parliament can put down questions about security operations?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the speech in question was not made in public. However, the answer to the hon. Member's question is that the Table Office will continue to examine questions carefully to ensure that they come within the rules of the House.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that I raised yesterday the question of a document that had been filed in the House of Commons, and to the ruling to which page 196 of "Erskine May" makes reference. I said that we expected to see a copy of the Leader of the Opposition's reply. Clearly, a reply would have been given, since otherwise an insult would be paid to the nation and to the House. However, subsequent inquiries have revealed that only a Minister of the Crown or yourself, Mr. Speaker, has the authority to lodge such a document in the Library. Will you consider whether or not the rules should be amended? The letter having been produced, it is not fair to the Opposition that they are unable to file it in the Library, and that right hon. and hon. Members are prevented from learning its contents. That letter clearly exists—it would be a disgrace if it did not—but a mechanism to allow the Opposition to bring it to the attention of right hon. and hon. Members does not exist.

Mr. Speaker: I must give the hon. Member the same answer that I gave him yesterday. I have no authority to require documents of that kind to be placed in the Library —any more than I have the authority to order the speech to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of Question Time. Is it sensible and relevant to apply the random selection procedure in respect of Scottish questions? The Under-Secretary responsible for industry pointed out that there were no questions today for the Ministers responsible for education and the health service in Scotland. Such questions may have been tabled, but eliminated by the random selection process. Given the Scottish Office's range of responsibilities, we shall have an opportunity to ask questions on those subjects and others only if the system is altered in respect of Scottish questions.

Mr. Speaker: The Select Committee on Procedure is examining the matter, and I suggest that the hon. Member makes his representations to that Committee, because I am conscious of the fact, particularly on Scottish Questions, that there is a ballot. I think that the House accepts that. I frequently call hon. Members whose questions appear lower down the Order Paper, and, indeed, some hon. Members who do not have questions on the Order Paper at all.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 14 JUNE

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Dudley Fishburn
Sir Peter Emery
Mr. Gordon McMaster

BILL PRESENTED

BADGERS (FURTHER PROTECTION)

Mr. Alan Meale, supported by Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Tony Banks, Sir Nicholas Bonsor, Mr. Roy Hughes, Mr. Simon Hughes and Sir Charles Morrison, presented a Bill to confer additional powers on a court where a dog has been used in or was present at the commission of certain offences under the Badgers Act 1973: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 17 May and to be printed. [Bill 155.]

Street Furniture (Design and Planning)

3.35 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to co-ordinate the design and planning of street furniture.

May I suggest that, when hon. Members go home this evening, they look at the streets around them with fresh eyes? What will they see but a forest of clutter? They should count the mass—or mess—of signs, signals, posts, lamps, bins, poles, bus shelters and kiosks that lie along the way. That jungle of metal, concrete and glass has, as so many things do these days, a fancy name—street furniture. That comes, no doubt, from the same mentality that calls a rat catcher a rodent eradication engineer.

London, like all British cities, is snared in a tangle of metal signs and bossy notices, which sprout from our streets like a forest. London and its suburbs are as polluted by that stuff as by noise or fumes—rather more so, in my estimation. The problem is that so many authorities have the power to put their bit of "furniture" where they like without consulting anybody else. Imagine the effect in your home, Mr. Speaker, if every friend or member of your family were able, without consultation, to put their furniture, lights and wallpaper wherever they wanted. That is what has happened in London's streets.

The average council has half a dozen different departments erecting poles, lights, parking meters, shelters and so on. British Telecom, the water and gas authorities, the local cable television company and old Uncle Tom Cobbleigh can erect their own signs without a care about where they go or what they are put next to. As each organisation knows that its own bossy notice is more important than anyone else's, it competes to be better placed—right in the way. It is no coincidence that, among the many people who support the Bill, the Royal National Institute for the Blind is one of the foremost. Our streets have become an obstacle course for blind people.

Not only is there usually no discussion within local authorities, but some companies, such as British Telecom, seem to have no in-house design of their own. Road signs come in every shade of the rainbow, including rust, because, once they are up they are never taken down again. Not only are our streets a clutter, but there is little sense of design. The idea of a street having "a look" has been abandoned to the vandalism of random bits of metal and concrete.

That work is done not only without planning permission but usually without a word of co-ordination. Other great European cities would never permit such a mess. The American cities teach us that if we do not do something soon, we could get even worse.

What is to be done? The Bill that I am introducing makes a start. On the day of the public expenditure debate, I reassure the House that my Bill will cost nothing. It is called—I am sorry to say that the rodent eradication engineers have got to Westminster, too—the Street Furniture (Design and Planning) Bill. It would oblige all the statutory bodies which have a right to put their stuff down in our streets to co-ordinate operations between themselves within the context of the local authority.

First, statutory bodies should get together on design. If they want to have orange and mauve signs in Stoke-on-Trent, let them. But at least let all the signs be in the same orange and mauve and in the same lettering. Local authorities should start to move towards a uniform typeface, a range of accepted colours and a range of standard materials.

In my constituency, the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea has taken an intelligent lead on the matter. It now co-ordinates within the town hall all decisions on street furniture. No longer does the traffic man go his separate way from the borough engineer. Local authorities should be allowed, even encouraged, to co-ordinate the appearance of our streets in the same way, for example, as the National Trust does of its properties.

Are lamp posts to be concrete or cast iron? Are pavements to be asphalt or York stone? Often there is a good reason for the concrete or asphalt, but if the decision is made by a competent, named group of people, well and good. My Bill does not seek to replace one form of bossiness with another. Its aim is not to allow local authorities to control things willy-nilly. It seeks to make those who wish to put down street furniture give the local authority 28 days' notice. If in that time the local authority does not indicate that it requires planning permission, the proposals should be allowed to go ahead.

We could also make progress by something as simple as the sharing of single metal poles. Why should not the parking sign and the no-left-turn sign share the same lamp post? Many bits, including lights, do not need to be on a pole in any case. The Royal National Institute for the Blind is in favour of street furniture such as lights being attached to houses along the sides of the streets rather than to metal poles in the middle of the street.

Local authorities do not hold all the cards. Therefore, my Bill also seeks to bring the many statutory authorities which have been so successfully privatised not within planning constraints but into the general planning picture in the local authority. British Telecom, British Gas and the cable television people have the right not only to dig up our streets but to put their bits on them afterwards. Under my Bill, they will need permission from the local authority to do so under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. At present, such bodies are exempt.

The general development order established by that Act spells out what requires planning permission and what does not. By objecting within 28 days, any local authority could bring the planning apparatus into play but, of course, it usually would not seek to.

My Bill would get around the nonsense by which orange kiosks can be plopped down without so much as a by-your-leave in front of any house in the land. If British Telecom decided to put a phone box outside No. 10 Downing street, there would be no method of preventing it from doing so. Under the general development order, there is no distinction between any ordinary street and conservation areas.

My Bill would help to encourage tidier streets throughout our cities. It would encourage local authorities to publish a code of practice. As happens in Kensington today, those rules would be established as a result of talking to residents and their associations whose streets are the ones that have to take the clutter. A little local democracy would see many a pole, board or notice come down. People like their streets to look neat. In and around London what we have instead is too often a mess.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. Matthew Carrington, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Richard Tracey, Mr. James Arbuthnot, Mr. Hugo Summerson, Mr. John Bowis and Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Street Furniture (Design and Planning)

Mr. Dudley Fishburn accordingly presented a Bill to co-ordinate the design and planning of street furniture: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 June and to be printed. [Bill 159.]

Public Expenditure

[Relevant documents: First report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of session 1990-91 on the 1990 Autumn Statement (House of Commons Paper No. 41), first special report containing the Government's response (House of Commons Paper No. 212) and the second report on the 1991 Budget (House of Commons Paper No. 289), so far as they relate to public expenditure.]

3.45 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Government's Expenditure Plans for 1991-92 to 1993-94 (Cm 1501 to 1520); and congratulates the Government on continuing to maintain its medium term objective that public spending should, over time, take a declining share of national income, while value for money is constantly improved and resources are concentrated in areas of high priority.

Although the documents referred to in the motion were published some time ago—in February—the debate is timely because, in the past few days, we have heard much about the fact that the Opposition want to fight the next general election on the issues of public spending and taxation. That is welcome news, because we can be proud of our record on public expenditure and taxation.

I am glad to have another opportunity to spell out our achievements on public spending and how we have increased spending in priority areas, while at the same time rooting out inefficiency and getting better value for money, thus keeping public expenditure under firm control. There is a marked contrast between our policies and those of the Opposition, who resist and resent value-for-money concepts in the public service and set out their stall with reckless promises to spend more on just about everything —*[Interruption.]* I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) is laughing derisively. There will be plenty more for him to laugh derisively about, although he may be unconvincing. However, I am sure that he is grateful for this public recognition—indeed, he is thanking me for it, quite appropriately.

We are debating the new departmental reports that replace the departmental chapters of the public expenditure White Paper. Their introduction marks the culmination of several years' consultation among the Government, the Public Accounts Select Committee and the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I am glad that the luminaries of those Committees are in their place today, and I thank both Committees for their work in seeking to improve the quality of financial reporting to Parliament. I hope that they feel that those departmental reports represent a good step forward in that regard. I know that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is holding an inquiry into those new arrangements, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of its deliberations.

There is much more information in those reports on objectives, output, value for money—all the issues about which taxpayers and their parliamentary representatives will be concerned. They will show them the value they get for their money in terms of effective delivery of high quality services.

Ten years ago, following the disastrous experiences of the late 1970s, my predecessors had to strive to bring public expenditure, especially the costs of administration,

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under control and to establish the fundamentals for the proper management of the public sector. The main emphasis had to be, first, on reducing the size of the Civil Service, and then on introducing a proper system of controlling costs. At the same time, the financial management initiative signalled the Government's concern to have effective public services.

Since then, as budgeting and management information systems in Government have improved, both the Treasury and the spending Departments have been able to focus more attention on the quality and effectiveness of public services. The control of public expenditure will always require hard decisions, but those decisions are becoming steadily better informed as Departments prepare and often publish much more information about their services.

Providing citizens with steadily improving services requires constant attention and initiatives from the Government. That is why I welcome—I hope that the whole House also welcomes—the initiatives proposed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for a citizen's charter, which will take the reforms of the past decade even further. The principles that have been enunciated are as follows: defining what the public can expect from public services; simplifying access to them; greater responsiveness to consumer needs; performance incentives and penalties for those who fail to deliver; publicly declared standards of services; greater accountability to the customer; and stronger complaints and redress procedures.

If we all care about public services—that should not be controversial, because we should all do so—we must realise that there is no point in having them unless they offer an effective public service. Perhaps one of the problems that bedevils debates on such issues is that we are all too obsessed with input and do not care enough about output. What matters is what the input produces in terms of effective and good quality public services. We intend to make early progress on fleshing out the proposals and turning them into concrete improvements.

What Opposition Members say illustrates one of the clearest differences between the Government and the Labour party. We are clear, while it is not, that there is no soft option of simply spending more money to compensate for inefficiency in the delivery of services. In addition, it is not realistic to set ideal targets for levels of service. We must seek to obtain quality of service which is good enough to meet the legitimate expectations of people who, in recent years, have become used to tremendous improvements in the quality and responsiveness of private sector suppliers. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said just two years ago, when he occupied the post of Chief Secretary, "shoddy public services are no longer an option".

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I have much sympathy with the theory behind what the Minister is propounding and have thought about the subject a lot over the years. However, will he give an example from the documents before us of a single output objective for next year or the year after in terms of the quality of service?

Mr. Mellor: I know of the hon. Gentleman's work on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, and that he is interested in the subject and has worked hard to play his part in advancing the discussions. There are commitments throughout the documents. With the 'next steps' agencies, we are committed to the establishment of the employment service and to setting criteria on and targets for the speed and effectiveness with which clients are dealt with. Such issues are at the heart of the 'next steps' approach, which is geared to the establishment of better performance through the establishment of targets and the rigorous monitoring of them.

Mr. Garrett: It is interesting that the framework documents state how output measures will be calculated, but do not give any such measures.

Mr. Mellor: I have read the documents, and that is certainly not my recollection of what is contained in them, but I am only too happy to set out the measures in writing. I have had the duty of looking at and giving an opinion on the targets set. I hope that we shall be able to proceed on that—I would welcome the opportunity to do so. Such matters should not be part of a partisan debate; they are about giving a more effective service.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): As ever, I am impressed by my right hon. and learned Friend's insistence that we get quality service and ensure that public expenditure targets do not run away with us. Has he noticed that Mr. Jacques Delors has been saying that he would like substantial increases in the amount of money transferred to other parts of the European Community? That money would have to come from, among other sources, British taxpayers. Does he agree that something must be said to Mr. Delors to disabuse him, and show him that that cannot be allowed to happen and the British Government will stick to the sound policies that they have sustained during the past ten years?

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Jacques Delors is every bit as much under scrutiny by the Treasury as any Secretary of State in a rampageous spending Ministry. Keeping the public expenditure commitments of the European Community and our contributions to them under control, is a much as priority as keeping domestic expenditure under control. No Department is allowed to feel that Euro-expenditure is a free lunch, allowing it spending arrangements that it would not get through the domestic debate.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose*——

Mr David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: No. I would like to move on, or we shall not get to the part of my speech that I suspect most people have come here to deal with.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Will the Chief Secretary give way, before he leaves Europe?

Mr. Mellor: I have left Europe.

Mr. Haynes *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: With the greatest respect, I am ready to proceed with my speech, despite the imploring and fetching body language of the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps I shall give way to him later. I am glad to have aroused some interest in my speech at last. A little earlier I was worried

that I was losing people. I am not sure whether the revived interest is due to me or to others, but I shall take the credit for it.

Concentrating on improved efficiency and value for money has played a vital role in our success in keeping total spending under firm control, as any responsible Government must if they are not to inflict an intolerable burden on taxpayers. In the 1960s and 1970s, public expenditure shot up from about one third of national output to 49 per cent. in the 1970s, and the size of the state and the bureaucracy that went with it grew and grew. It has been a major achievement to have brought public spending down to about 40 per cent. of national output in the 1980s. We remain committed to that approach.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Chief Secretary give way on that exact point?

Mr. Mellor: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman's question is on that exact point. We shall see.

Mr. Winnick: I hope that my question is relevant. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that people are complaining all over the country about the appalling delays and difficulties in transport, health, housing, and about street crime and beggars in the streets? I do not remember begging and street crime in the London area before 1979 being anything like as bad as now. People understand that much of this is the result of underfunding. The gimmicks that the Chief Secretary has been talking about will not resolve those difficulties until more money has been spent.

Mr. Mellor: Because of our success in achieving eight years of sustained growth at more than 3 per cent. in the 1980s, it has been possible to increase public expenditure by nearly 20 per cent. in real terms while reducing the share of the national cake that it consumes. Public expenditure on all the services that the hon. Gentleman mentioned has substantially increased. Believing that they may be relevant to the debate, I intend to deal with some of these very figures.

For instance, the hon. Gentleman mentioned law and order. Expenditure on law and order services has doubled in real terms since 1979, and there has been substantial expenditure on motorway building and other such projects, which I shall particularise later. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) will also remember that, during his previous sojourn in the House, he sat on the Labour Government Back Benches while dreadful cuts were made in spending on almost everything that he has just mentioned. Was he as outraged then as he is by our record? I have not checked.

When considering the flurry of charge and counter-charge between the parties on public expenditure and taxation, it is always worth consulting the book before looking into the crystal ball. The book shows clear differences between this Government's achievements in the 1980s and those of the Labour Government in the 1970s. Because of the eight years of continuous growth at more than 3 per cent. which our policies made possible, we were able to raise public expenditure—*[Interruption.]*

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) talks to me about growth and says that Labour's record on growth was better. As he wants to compare growth records, let us do just that. The Labour party says that its growth record is better than ours, despite the fact that we have been the beneficiaries of the windfall of North sea oil. However, the growth in non-oil GDP—taking North sea oil out altogether—was 1·2 per cent. between 1974 and 1979, but between 1979 and 1990 it was 1·9 per cent. That figure should have wider currency, and I am glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has given me an opportunity to give it such currency.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Earlier, the Chief Secretary implied that in the 1980s the Conservatives had a growth record of 3 per cent. Does he recollect that, only a few weeks ago, one of his hon. Friends confirmed that the average rate of economic growth from 1979 to 1991 is 1·75 per cent?

Mr. Mellor: I have given the right hon. and learned Gentleman the non-oil GDP figures. He wants to be punctilious, so I shall be so. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's problem is his unwillingness to attend to detail, but I shall be happy to travel through the detail with him. I said that there were eight years in the 1980s with continuous growth of over 3 per cent. In order to get the figures on which the right hon. and learned Gentleman relies, he has to credit us in the first two years of one administration with having to recover from the situation into which the Labour Government plunged us. The idea that a Government influence growth from the moment they are elected is nonsense.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Is the Chief Secretary taking responsibility for the first two years of the last Labour Government, 1974 and 1975, when we were cleaning up after the Barber boom and the oil price increase? If he is, there were no recessions at all in the years of that Labour Government.

Mr. Mellor: No comment on those years excuses what happened thereafter. We remember negotiatiations with the IMF, the sight of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) being heaved off his plane, and the massive cuts in public expenditure that followed. It would be stretching poetic licence to blame those matters on the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). The hon. Lady has tried similarly impossible arguments in the past.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: No; I must press on with my speech.

Spending under us has risen by 19 per cent. in real terms, while the burden of public expenditure was kept under tight control. That meant that the real-terms increase in general Government expenditure at 1989-90 prices was nearly £34 billion, equivalent to total spending on the national health service. Notwithstanding the priority that Labour rhetoric attaches to it, public expenditure fell by 2·5 per cent. in real terms during the Labour years. Under us, it has increased by 19 per cent.

We have been able to reduce the basic rate of income tax from 33p to 25p, and in the Budget measures currently being debated in Committee, we propose that next year the rate of corporation tax be reduced to 33p, whereas in 1979 it was 52p. Labour says that tax rates cannot be cut while increasing provision for public services. Our record shows that we can do that and have done it while running honest public finances. Under Labour, the public sector borrowing requirement in 1975-76 was 9·5 per cent. of

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gross domestic product, equivalent to almost £60 billion at today's prices. The average PSBR in the Labour years at 1989-90 prices was £25·6 billion, or 6·75 per cent. of GDP.

Over our term in office from 1979 to 1991, the PSBR averaged £6·4 billion, or 1·75 per cent. of GDP. For a period of three years, about £26 billion of Budget surplus was used to reduce the national debt, thereby saving annual interest charges, which have to come out of public expenditure and must take priority over other public expenditure commitments, amounting to £2·5 billion this year. That is the benefit and reward of running prudent public finances.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Chief Secretary is a former Minister for the Arts. Will he acknowledge that at least during the term of a Labour Government Edinburgh university was not reduced to selling its treasures, such as the Audubon book on birds? If matters are as the Chief Secretary makes out, how is it that, in order to find the wherewithal to continue academically, one of the great European universities has to sell its treasures? There is a crisis here. Will the Treasury look at it?

Mr. Mellor: That assumes a lot about the management which had led to that situation. As far as I know, the problem may not lie at the door of the Government, and the hon. Gentleman, who I know is fair, will realise that I have no detailed knowledge of that, but I shall certainly look at the matter.

Mr. Skinner That is why my hon. Friend asked the question.

Mr. Mellor: I am sure that is why he asked the question. Equally, there are aspects of the hon. Gentleman's constituency of which my knowledge might not be great.

I referred earlier to growth, and I have noted the Labour party's suggestion that a growth rate of 2·5 per cent. under a future Labour Government could be taken for granted. When one considers the non-oil gross domestic product figure that I quoted earlier, I suspect that "it ain't necessarily so".

The Labour party criticises us for attaching importance to reducing the share of national wealth consumed by public expenditure. Recently, it has seemed to get close to suggesting that every penny raised from future growth should be spent on public expenditure, and that it would otherwise be wasted. That is an astonishing concept, which seems to be coming back into favour in the Labour party just as it has fallen out of favour in eastern Europe.

Enormous public benefits flow from leaving more resources at the disposal of individuals and companies within a free economy. They stimulate individuals to greater effort, and remove the curse of the brain drain. Another statistic which we should not let slip from our minds is that there was a net outflow of nearly 70,000 professional people and managers during the years of the Labour Government. There has been a 30,000 net inflow under the Conservative Government, and that has led to a greater contribution to income tax from the higher rate payers.

There is also ample scope for business investment. To listen to the Labour party, one would think that its record on that was something to be proud of and that the Conservative party's record was something of which we should be ashamed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Labour Members shout, "Hear, hear," so it is just as well that I have come to the House with the record. It shows that, at constant 1985 prices, comparing like with like——

Mr. John Smith: The Treasury has been burning the midnight oil.

Mr. Mellor: The Treasury has indeed been burning the midnight oil. If it were burnt a little more in Transport house, some of the errors that have disfigured the Labour party's figures would not exist. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East comes out with more dodgy figures than a weight-watchers' convention.

At constant 1985 prices, business investment—I shall get to this point by hook or by crook—*[Interruption.]* I wish to appeal to all sections of my audience. At constant 1985 prices, business investment in 1974 was £35·3 billion. By 1978, after falls in 1975 and 1977, business investment was effectively stagnant at £35·9 billion. The equivalent figure for 1988 was £52·3 billion, for 1989 it was £56·1 billion and for 1990 it was £55·4 billion.

When Labour points to a decline in business investment in recent months, it will be aware that it is a decline from the historically high levels achieved in the previous two years under the Conservative Government. That represents a tremendous increase in investment from that prevailing in the late 1970s.

I should also mention our achievements in investment in infrastructure. In 1990-91, total public sector spending on asset creation is expected to be about £30 billion. Under this Government, public sector investment has risen in real terms—I hate having to return to this point, but respect for the truth compels me to do so—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that hon. Members are still following my argument. Under the Labour Government in the 1970s, investment fell by about a quarter in real terms. That was not a laughing matter then, and it should be a continuing embarrassment to the Labour party.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will certainly give way in a moment.

Earlier, in an intervention, the hon. Member for Walsall, North asked questions about roads and other public expenditure projects. It is tedious to go through them all, but the planned spend on motorways and national roads in the two years between 1991-92 and 1993-94 is 25 per cent. higher in real terms than in the past three years, and that comes after substantial growth in spending under this Government.

In this financial year, planned spending on motorways and trunk roads is more than double the level of 1979-80 in real terms. Furthermore, under the last Labour Government that investment fell by 40 per cent. If one wants a contrast, that one is as good and effective as any available.

Mr. Blunkett: Does the Chief Secretary accept that some of the most crucial spending on infrastructure work is undertaken by local authorities—for example, in education, housing, road repairs and the environment? Yet such spending has fallen as a proportion of gross domestic product under the Conservative Government from 3·6 per cent. to 1·8 per cent., which is a scandalous under-investment in our future.

Mr. Mellor: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that expenditure available to local government has increased under this Government. As he knows, prioritisation has had to take place. One of the major differences between the hon. Gentleman's side of the House and ours is that the Opposition seem to assume that the best way to achieve success in government is for every budget to increase. The answer is that one achieves success by rigorous prioritisation. The problem for the Labour party is that everything is a priority, so one ends up with nothing being a priority, as I shall seek to demonstrate.

Nothing illustrates more clearly the difference between the record of the parties and the emptiness of a good deal of the rhetoric than the national health service, and I make no apology for mentioning it only one day after the House spent some time debating the issue.

Mr. John Smith: Watch your step.

Mr. Mellor: I shall watch it—the right hon. and learned Gentleman will watch it for me, and I know that he will intervene if I get any of these facts wrong.

Mr. Smith: By hook or by crook.

Mr. Mellor: Yes, he will intervene by hook or by crook—whether they are hooked figures or crooked figures, he will tell me.

As I have already said, total expenditure on the national health service has increased from £8 billion to £32 billion—a tremendous increase. Since we took office, the percentage of GDP devoted to health has increased from 4·5 per cent. in 1978-79 to 5·2 per cent., and the share of public expenditure devoted to health as a result of the prioritisation that I mentioned has increased from 12 to 14 per cent.

Under us, health is the second largest budget. That was not the case under Labour. We have achieved an average real increase of 3·2 per cent. a year and gross capital spending on English hospitals and other health facilities has increased by 53 per cent. To put that achievement in concrete terms, the amount spent every year for each person in the United Kingdom, at constant prices, has risen from £390 in 1979 to £570 today—a massively increased investment for every man, woman and child, in a health service that we certainly recognise as vital for all of us.

Let us compare that with the record of the last Labour Government.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I should like to finish this passage and then I shall give way, if the hon. Gentleman wants to take issue with me on the health service.

In 1977-78 Labour cut real spending on the NHS by 2·5 per cent. It is true that, during their period in office, real spending increased, but it was at less than half the rate that we have managed, and they cut real capital spending by no less than 16 per cent.

One does not have to travel too far in this country to see evidence of the massive increase in hospital building, renewals and renovations in today's health service.

Mr. Battle *rose*—

Mr. Mellor: I am still on the subject of the health service. I shall certainly give way; I have not forgotten the hon. Gentleman—I know that he takes an interest in these matters.

I want to spend a moment or two considering Labour's claims about the future of health service expenditure. The 1979 Labour manifesto called for increases in the percentage of GDP devoted to health—an implicit acceptance that 1974 to 1979 was a period when the Labour Government underfunded the NHS. Apart from the slashing cuts to the hospital building programme, there were also cuts in the pay of national health service employees. Nurses' pay went down by 21 per cent.

Moving forward to the 1987 election, Labour continued to say that the national health service was underfunded. A point that I hope will not be lost on those on the Opposition Front Bench is that, at that point, the Leader of the Opposition was calling for a 3 per cent. real-terms increase in spending on health. Labour fought the last election on the basis that the underfunding of the NHS would be addressed by a 3 per cent. real terms increase in spending every year.

Let us look at what has happened in the last five years. We find that this Government have increased spending on health not by 3 per cent. in real terms but by 3·5 per cent. in real terms, yet Labour still says that the NHS is underfunded. What does it propose to do about it? As usual, there is muddle and confusion. At one moment the Leader of the Opposition told the interlocutor-general, Mr Walden, that there will not be an immediate increase. Later, he said that spending on health will rise in line with gross projections of 2·5 per cent. per annum and that it will take its share of the £20 billion crock of gold that he magically conjured up for his audience last Wednesday—"just like that," as the late Tommy Cooper used to say. How much we could do with him now in order to demonstrate the inadequacies of the Labour party's policy.

What sort of a policy is it? If that policy of a 2·5 per cent. increase in real spending on the NHS had been pursued since 1979, spending this year on the NHS would be £2·6 billion less than it actually is. Therefore, Labour's analysis—that the only problem with the NHS is underfunding and that anything that the Labour party proposes will put it right—is plainly wrong. At every stage, the Labour party proposes a scale of increase that it less than that which we have achieved. An unholy alliance has allegedly built up between the Labour party and the British Medical Association, but did the Labour party rush to say—if I have got this wrong, someone will intervene—that it will immediately given the BMA the £6 billion that it thinks is necessary? Silence is golden when it comes to that line of argument.

The Government have therefore arrived at the irresistible conclusion that, if we have increased expenditure on the health service by 3·2 per cent., in real terms, every year for more than 12 years—that of itself is not enough to put everything right, although it has led to very major improvements in the NHS—then we must address issues such as organisation, efficiency, better value for money and improved responsibility when it comes to the needs of patients.

What would the Labour party do about those issues? It has nothing to say about them. Although the Opposition condemn the status quo as inadequate, they suggest no effective alternative policies for change. The hon. Member

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for Livingston (Mr. Cook) delighted his many admirers in the House yesterday. He is ever so bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and aggressive in the House when these issues are debated, but I want to know when he intends to show similar forthrightness when he talks to the health service unions. When is he going to get them to allow him to outline policies to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the NHS? That is where he should be exercising his formidable strength of character and rhetorical powers. Until he is willing to say boo to the unions' goose, his fiery oratory here will be merely the big boom of an empty drum.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Why is the proportion of Britain's gross domestic product spent on health less than that spent by the United States, Germany and Italy? As a share of GDP, does the Minister want that amount to increase or decrease? He tells us about output figures, but why will the Government not set targets to bring down increasing waiting lists?

Mr. Mellor: Is the hon. Gentleman really commending to me the system in the United States, where 10 per cent. of gross domestic product is spent on health care, yet 33 million people are without health cover? That is the spuriousness of international comparisons. The hon. Gentleman falls precisely into the trap that I identified earlier, of confusing input with output. If, when I was Minister of Health, I had obtained £1 billion from the Treasury and had literally burnt it at the Cenotaph, which lies conveniently between the Treasury and the Department of Health, allegedly I would have increased the proportion of GNP devoted to health, and we would have had a better health service. That is the nonsense of it. The whole House should realise that.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the health service, surely the way to clarify some of the problems in Labour party policy would be to drop a note to the Leader of the Opposition, asking him to clarify the figures. I had it in mind that my right hon. Friend had done so but I have not been able to find a copy of the reply. My right hon. Friend must have received a response; perhaps he would like to tell the House what was in it.

Mr. Mellor: It may have been posted, but it has not yet arrived, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way; I have to get on.

I want to deal with last Wednesday and the antics of the Leader of the Opposition about the £20 billion. His speech was heavily trailed. The astonishing thing was that what one learned about it the night before was not built on in the speech itself. The commitment is in four lines on a piece of paper. It does not tell us many things which we have waited a further week to be enlightened upon; we still do not know.

Was the £20 billion announced in full awareness of the Government's expenditure plans? On the radio on Monday, the shadow Chancellor seemed clear that it was not in addition to the Government's expenditure plans. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday was ridiculing the Government's expenditure plans, saying that they were based on nominal money, not real money, so the Government's expenditure programme did not amount to much. Apparently the right hon. Gentleman is now saying that the £20 billion may be on top. Is it cumulative? Is it £20 billion added up, with little contributions here and there?

I gather that the shadow Chancellor gave a press conference today at which he talked about £4 billion a year over five years. Or is it the final year cost? The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. I think that we should be told, if the Opposition are setting themselves out to be credible on these vital public finance issues and to manage their public expenditure as the legacy of previous Labour Governments made clear. There is nothing more fundamental to issues of confidence in Government than that.

No doubt the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has come to the House aware of the extraordinary hole in the centre of Labour's mint on the issue and will want to address it at great length. I look forward to being told exactly what the Leader of the Opposition was up to when he said what he did. I do not think that people will understand if we are not told the answer to that question.

We have published our plans in the Red Book. We will increase spending by £26 billion in cash over the next two years. We plan in cash, not in funny money. In today's money, allowing for inflation, that provides for significant growth in real terms. Everything is set out in the Red Book, including assumptions for growth, inflation and the PSBR. One thing is clear. Labour cannot magic extra public spending painlessly out of growth dividends.

Of course there will be growth. The record shows that there is more likely to be growth under us than under Labour *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. I have given the non-oil GDP figure; let the hon. Gentleman argue with that in due course. As I say, we have taken account of it in our published plans which are on the record for all to see.

There will be extra spending; that too is on the record. If Labour wants to spend more than that—apparently, despite attempts by the shadow Chancellor to restrain him, the Leader of the Opposition does—it has two simple choices: either it has to put up taxes to pay for it or it has to find the money by allowing the PSBR to stay up, and even go up. If Labour does that, it will go back to the bad old days of the 1970s; the bill would have to be paid, and taxes would have to rise.

We already know that the chap on £20,000 a year—the deputy head teacher, the police sergeant—[AN HON. MEMBER: "The nurse."]—yes, some senior nurses—and middle management will have their marginal rates increased by 9 per cent. There will have to be tax increases, but the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has still not told us about the exciting ideas for different bands of tax—between 20 per cent. and 50 per cent.—which would allow many sly increases to the basic rate man. I suspect that, with Labour's expenditure plans in such disarray, the average taxpayer would if Labour were elected, be carried across more thresholds than Elizabeth Taylor or Zsa Zsa Gabor.

I shall deal with the muddle and confusion into which Labour's public expenditure proposals have been plunged. Aneurin Bevan said that socialism was the language of priorities. In today's Labour party, everything seems to be a priority. In February last year, the hon. Member for Derby, South propounded what I call "Beckett's law", which states that Labour has only two spending priorities

—pensions and child benefit. That was a desperate attempt to impose some discipline on the extraordinary range of public spending commitments poured forth by Labour's spokesmen. That was in February 1990, but let us consider the language of priorities since then.

I begin with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. In Blackpool on 1 October 1990, he said:

"education and training will be a key priority for Labour because they are vital to the success of the economy."

In February 1990, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said on Radio 4:

"We accept that there have got to be priorities and I can say now that as far as the Labour party is concerned, bridging the skills gap is going to be a priority."

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East proceeded to Leeds yesterday and told the chamber of commerce:

"The Labour party believes strongly that more rather than less expenditure on developing human capital within the British economy is an urgent priority."

The hon. Member for Derby, South will no doubt tell us how that fits in with Beckett's law.

In March 1990, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East told *Tribune:*

"growth and investment in manufacturing should be a key priority"

and:

"the Government should directly support growth in manufacturing industries, and in new technology, and in the skill of our people".

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley, (Mrs. Clwyd) told *Labour Party News:*

"As Shadow Secretary of State, I want to see Britain reach the UN target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP as a top priority."

This morning, on Radio 4's "Today" programme, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) once again said that training would be one of Labour's priorities. Those who heard the interview will know that he repeatedly denied the assertion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment that he was in any way constrained in saying that by Beckett's law, which appears to have become utterly redundant.

However, things get worse. Labour's Janus-faced approach to these issues has been exposed. The Opposition Treasury Front Bench team have been on the prawn cocktail circuit in the City reassuring people: "Labour doesn't mean it; we are frightfully responsible these days." But all Labour's spending spokesmen have been going around the country spewing out to every interested group that wants to know any number of spending commitments. I only have time for three—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."] There will be time for more.

Something that must have frightened the Labour party more than anything was a headline in—[HON. MEMBERS: "The Sun."] No, not in *The Sun* but in *The Independent* of Friday 10 May 1991. This is a quality debate. The headline stated: "Meacher tells of pension plans". That is enough to send shock waves the length and breadth of the Labour party. In 1987, the verb "to meach" was coined. It means to make extravagant additional commitments hourly. The hon. Gentleman was sat on for that. Some people thought that he was no longer with us when, like something out of "The Munsters", he lurched back into the pages of *The Independent* with a whole raft of expenditure plans on pensions—the status of which the hon. Member for Derby, South will tell us all about, no doubt.

The principal rival of the hon. Member for Oldham, West in the "meaching" stakes—although it is a hotly contested status in the Labour party these days—is the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who leads for the Opposition on transport matters. Labour has a little list of the people who will pay more tax; I have a big list of all the things on which the Opposition say they propose to spend it.

Let me tell the House just one of the commitments given by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. By the way, it is not ancient history; it appeared in *Hansard* on 22 April 1991, and it is well worth listening to: "the Government have the overriding"—

note the use of the word "overriding"—

"responsibility to see that there is a high-speed rail link from the tunnel not only to London but to areas beyond—the midlands, the north, Wales and Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 760.]

The issue is not the desirability of the project but its cost and affordability and the priority that it is to be given.

I want to know what the hon. Member for Derby, South thinks the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East meant by "overriding responsibility". Just so that people should not be tempted to joke about the matter, I should explain that we are not talking about billions of pounds; that pledge would involve tens of billions of pounds. We are not messing around with little numbers here.

We must get on, and I certainly want to finish my remarks—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame"]—but I cannot resist ending my speech with a reference to the visit of Mr. Andrew Rawnsley of *The Guardian* to Monmouth in connection with the by-election campaign. Mr. Rawnsley writes:

"If much of what Mr. Evans says is gobsmacking, Mr. Edwards"—

who is, of course, the Labour candidate——

"appears to have been gobstoppered. You get the impression that he would not go to the lavatory before checking with Neil Kinnock for permission."

The House should bear in mind the fact that Mr. Rawnsley was writing in *The Guardian*. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] Hang on a minute; we have not even got to the best bit yet. Mr. Rawnsley continued:

"But it became apparent that when Labour lobotomised this candidate, they did not quite finish his reprogramming. Did he expect Labour to renationalise the water companies? 'Er, . . . um . . . oh,' the candidate said, eyes flashing with panic. 'Yes,' he finally gulped. 'Not on day one,' came a stage whisper from the shadow minister, Ann Taylor. 'Yes,' Mr. Edwards amplified."

What does all that mean?

Mrs. Beckett: Not a lot.

Mr. Mellor: Not a lot—the hon. Lady is absolutely right. To the aficionados of the renationalisation of water —*[Interruption.]* This is a typical tactic. For the benefit of those geared to the renationalisation of water, a genuflection is made in their direction—"Water will be renationalised." To those concerned about financial probity, "Not a lot," says the hon. Member for Derby, South. To make sense of all this and to avoid getting into a muddle, Labour Members will not have to renationalise water; they will have to walk on it.

Mrs. Beckett: I have as little faith in my chances of doing that as I do in those of the right hon. and learned Gentleman. My remark referred to the article by Mr. Rawnsley. I do not think that his comments mean

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anything at all, given that Mr. Rawnsley has made it plain that the Conservative candidate is a gift to the speech writers, whatever he may be to the electorate.

Mr. Mellor: I can tell the hon. Lady this: our candidate is an estimable man, and one of the main reasons why he is estimable is that he does not make reckless public expenditure commitments.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Before my right hon. and learned Friend concludes, I should perhaps tell him that, the other day, I had the pleasure, with my friend the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), of interviewing the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South—[HON. MEMBERS: "Derby, South."] The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was able to tell us more about the Labour party's spending plans for the health service, which appears to be an overall, overriding, key, superior, first-class, top priority—as opposed to an ordinary priority. She explained that Labour would abide by the commitment to increase the pay of all lower-paid staff to at least half—I think that this is the terminology—the median pay of an industrial worker. This, she thought, would have no effect on differentials. None the less, all health service pay would be fully funded, and the commitment to increase spending on the health service was additional. Apparently, these commitments to extra spending relate only to patient care, and pay is on top of that. My right hon. and learned Friend can add that to his impressive list.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The spotlight is being shone on Labour's expenditure plans, and the Opposition Front-Bench Treasury spokesmen are finding it impossible, as the water gushes over the feeble dam that they have erected, to maintain—that they are responsible. That is demonstrated by every single statement about spending priorities, and it will be a key issue for the future.

I am sure that the hon. Lady will have answers to all these questions, so the best thing I can do is make way for her. The contrast between the Government plans that we are debating today—carefully prioritised, sustainable and targeted where spending is needed most—and the cloud-cuckoo-land ambitions and total incoherence of the Opposition's plans is striking and dramatic. It is on that basis that I commend these reports to the House.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to point out that, despite the fact that this is a vitally important debate, the Opposition have managed to muster only 10 Back Benchers and a dog—and the dog is worth more than the rest of them put together. This poor attendance is despite the fact that public spending is what Opposition Members are meant to be good at.

4.36 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"regrets the continued decline of the public services under this Government; regrets the Government's refusal to provide a proper level of support for the United Kingdom's manufacturing base and for the provision of training; and furthermore condemns this Government's clear intention to learn nothing from the recession into which this neglect has plunged the country, and to continue to put tax cuts before public investment".

I am most impressed by the Conservative turnout to support the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I had no idea that he needed such support. My hon. Friends are working very hard in Monmouth to ensure that the Government's public spending plans are carefully scrutinised.

Mr. Battle: Where was the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) yesterday?

Mr. Oppenheim: I was here.

Mr. Battle: He was not.

Mrs. Beckett: I am disinclined to take attendance lectures from the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), whose attendance record is far from good.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady has just told the House that her hon. Friends are canvassing in Monmouth. Is it not a fact that they are paid to be in the House of Commons? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Let us get on with the debate.

Mrs. Beckett: By tomorrow, there may be another Opposition Member paid to be in the House of Commons.

This debate, entertaining though its tone has been, is meant to be a review of the record and intentions of the Government's spending programme, in the pretty dim light cast on them by the publication of the departmental reports as a follow-up to the broad predictions of the autumn statement. In the House today, as on television at the weekend, the Chief Secretary asked, "Why look in the crystal ball when you can read the book?", serenely unaware, evidently, that in all too many state schools these days the problem is first to find the book. What he meant, of course, was unexceptionable. He meant that we should look at the facts, the evidence, and not just what is written in the departmental reports, or the autumn statement, or the autumn statement supplement, or, indeed, the Red Book. He wants us to look at what is written in those books, but also at the facts of the vast improvements that he claims have occurred in public services.

This debate is bedevilled by two factors. The first is the Government's determination to be all things to all people and to face both ways at once. Perhaps even more serious is their terror of finding themselves trapped into rational debate about the choices that confront this country in the years ahead. The first factor has led the Government—in their determination to please all audiences—into the ludicrous position of boasting to Tories how they have kept public spending down, and to the electorate that they have increased it. The Chief Secretary was at it again today.

The Government's terror of admitting that there could ever be any merit in anything that Labour says has put them into an even more extraordinary position. They claim to detect wild extravagance in our proposals, and then—sometimes on the same day—they condemn us for proposing to spend less than they would have done.

Mr. Skinner: They did that today.

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend says, the Chief Secretary managed to do both in his speech today.

To support their case, such as it is, the Government fling about different and fairly meaningless statements and figures. It is hardly any wonder that the phrases "creative accounting" and "being economical with the truth" both came into common usage under the present Government.

Let us look first at what the spending plans show. There are wild variations in the Government's cash figures. The Chief Secretary did not refer to them with such gusto today, but there has been mention of £26 billion here and £40 billion there—all in cash terms. However, between the public expenditure White Paper published in February 1990 and last November's autumn statement, there was a leap in the planning totals for the current year of £9 billion in cash terms, and for next year, of £11·6 billion.

It is for that reason that more interesting and relevant are the spending figures in real terms when inflation is taken into account. What they indicate is that despite the figures of £26 billion and £40 billion that the Chief Secretary quoted for different periods the planning totals have changed very little since 1985.

In presenting his autumn statement last November, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"Since 1984-85, while the economy has grown by nearly 20 per cent., total public spending has risen scarcely at all in real terms."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 117.]

That means that, even in 1988-89, during the boom years to which the Chief Secretary referred—they seem to be the only years to which he wanted to refer—public service investment at best stood still. The departmental figures show that in the three years ahead covered by the current plan, there will be either a standstill or a decline in real terms in the budgets of the Departments responsible for industry, employment, transport, housing, education, and overseas aid.

That picture is borne out by what little clear information we can glean from the departmental reports. Support for industry has been halved since 1978-79, and is due to fall still further, until it is one third of the level that the Government inherited. Since 1985, the industry budget has been cut from more than £2,000 million to a planned £730 million for 1993-94. That means a cut in collaborative research and development, technology transfer, consultancy budgets, and regional and export support. That is even before the Government implement their insane plan to sell off the Export Credits Guarantee Department, even if the only people who will buy it are our competitors.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I refer the hon. Lady to the table on page 26 of the "Autumn Statement", which details public spending in real terms over the past 25 years. In 1974-75, that figure had reached £180 billion, but by 1978-79, it had fallen by £5 billion to £175 billion. That is Labour's record. Since then, public spending has risen to £209 billion in the current year. If we want a real indication of what would be likely to happen in the event of a Labour Government, perhaps we should consider that party's past record.

Mrs. Beckett: It will take me a few moments to find the table to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but his remarks do not in any way controvert the point that I was making. As the Chief Secretary was kind enough to remind the House, while the Government enjoyed all the benefits of North sea oil and what have been described as the miracle years of growth, public spending stood still—and only now is it forecast that it will possibly rise.

As to training, an even more extraordinary picture emerges in the present period of recession. There is a real-terms cut in employment and training programmes of £365 million, of which £120 million was quietly restored recently—still leaving a net cut of £245 million. That was also the picture last year. Then, the Government asserted that it was perfectly all right for training investment to fall because unemployment was falling. In itself, that was a dishonest argument, because not only was the overall figure falling in real terms, but there was a cut in training per head—including support not only for the young and long-term unemployed but for those suffering from disabilities.

This year—with unemployment undoubtedly soaring—we should surely expect employment and training budgets to rise. Certainly not. The budget continues to be cut, but now the Government have a new excuse. This year, cuts are being made not because of falling unemployment, but because, to quote the Department's document,

"Training is not always the best way of getting the long-term unemployed back to work. For the long-term unemployed, the Department has reviewed existing programmes and expanded employment services."

The impression is given that, although training provision is being cut, other efforts are being expanded. There are two things wrong with that assertion. Cash cuts in training for the unemployed this year total £597 million. Cash increases in the other employment services that are to be provided total just £36 million—representing a net cash cut of £560 million.

Also revealing is the change in the content of the Department's report. Those right hon. and hon. Members who are familiar with these debates may recall that in 1989, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) drew attention to a helpful chart in the transport document, which distinguished between roads that had been improved and those that had deteriorated—and which presented a very bad picture. By 1990, that helpful little diagram no longer appeared in the relevant document.

Last year, I pointed out that a table in the relevant document showed an overall cut not only in training but in the training budget per head. Guess what? That helpful table is not included in this year's document either. That puts the House in a dilemma, and perhaps we may look to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or to someone else, to assist us. How can we continue to sustain such debates over the years if, every time that we cite useful pieces of information, they disappear?

The Government's programme also includes a provision of £60 million to help the elderly with private health insurance, and £300 million for reforms that are being implemented without pilot projects being undertaken, and within a time scale that will probably mean that much of that money will be wasted. The budget for city technology colleges is on much the same scale as all the money that the Government are making available for the rest of the nation's schools.

It was strange that the Chief Secretary referred in his television interview on Sunday to the waste of surplus school places. Six hundred surplus places in secondary education exist in my own city of Derby, because, despite efficient tertiary reorganisation, approved by the Department of Education, it is not always easy to match exactly numbers of pupil places. However, the

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Government are proposing to add another 900 to those existing 600 surplus places, by opening a city technology college in Derby. That would seem to make likely the closure of another school—but it is unlikely that such a closure will go ahead.

One of the main reasons for the surplus places is the Government's opt-out programme. Even when a school is opting out only because the local authority, obeying the Department of Education and Science, wishes to remove surplus places, the Department is likely to approve the opting out. It was incredible that the Chief Secretary complained about that waste of public money—which it is—when it is the Government who have made it impossible for economies to be made.

Mr. Winnick: The Chief Secretary was characteristically delighted with himself and made some funny jokes—or that is what he intended—but does my hon. Friend agree that in the real world, such as in Derby, Monmouth and many other places where by-elections and local elections have been held, people are fed up with the delays, difficulties and cuts to which she referred? Although the Chief Secretary was able to persuade about 30 Conservative Back Benchers who listened to his speech, he seems unable to convince the country, including Monmouth.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right.

Apart from the opt-out scheme, there are various black holes in the Government's spending plans into which about £6 billion net of public expenditure will have disappeared, such as personal pensions and the £10 billion or more that was spent on the poll tax, for which not a single extra teacher, home help, caretaker, firefighter or police officer has been provided.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The hon. Lady is obviously concerned about education. Will she explain to teachers who are earning more than the basic wage how she will compensate them for removing the upper limit on national insurance, or is that yet another expenditure pledge that the Labour party will fail to meet?

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall deal with that matter later.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Will the hon. Lady acknowledge that the Red Book forecasts an increase in public spending of £38 billion in cash terms over the next three years? To avoid keeping the House in suspense any longer, will she solve the mystery to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary alluded? Is the Leader of the Opposition's promise of an extra £20 billion over the lifetime of a Parliament in addition to or instead of that £38 billion, or does she not know?

Mrs. Beckett: Only Conservative Members could make a mystery out of that. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall deal with that point, too. *[Interruption.]* If I were a Conservative Member, I would not laugh quite so heartily. I am prepared to answer those questions when I reach the logical point in my speech. *[Interruption.]* I am not in the slightest concerned about Conservative Members.

Whatever may be obscure, hidden or difficult to find in the Government's plans, one thing is crystal clear: the Labour party is saying that we will not spend more than the economy can afford but that we will put every penny that the economy can afford into investment and public services.

The Government's record and their forecasts show a consistent but completely different picture. From 1982-83 to last year, the trend has been of steady decline in the proportion of our wealth spent on public services. Plans for the coming year—there is a helpful table in the Red Book—show that, although there has been a temporary rise because of the recession, the Government intend that the proportion of our national wealth spent in the public sector should begin to fall again as early as next year.

The Government are not prepared to put as much as the economy can afford into such investment and services in the future any more than they were prepared to do in the past. They are still making the same choice, to which the Chancellor has often referred. He said in his speech the other day at the Adam Smith Institute:

"I occasionally read in the press that this Government has gone soft on public spending. That is complete nonsense."

That is not the message that the Chief Secretary was trying to convey today. The Chancellor continued:

"the need to reduce the size of the public sector remain at the top of the Government's agenda. It is only by keeping spending under control that we will be able to deliver the income tax cuts to which we are committed."

There could be no clearer statement of the choice that the Government wish to make.

The Labour party argues that the extra resources that the Government have earmarked for tax cuts should go into public spending.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Has the hon. Lady taken careful note that the Government's expenditure plans for the next five years would not permit them to achieve the reduction in income tax to 20p in the pound, to which they have often referred? The electorate should not believe them, and the hon. Lady should not build her spending plans on them.

Mrs. Beckett: I would not dream of building anything on the figures published in the Government's documents. The hon. Gentleman is correct, but he assumes that the figures given by the Government for their spending programme mean very much. I shall return to that point.

The Labour party has identified the fact that, in many respects, we would make different choices from those made by the Government of which the city technology college programme is an example. We believe that such money would be better diverted to nursery education, which would benefit a greater section of the community. We have identified ways in which the Government waste money, such as on the poll tax. We have identified the fact that there are revenues from growth in any normal year and that we would use all of them.

We have stated without equivocation the tax changes that we propose, of which the principal measures are the increase in the top rate of tax to 50p in the pound, not at the threshold where the present top rate applies, although even that affects about only 6 per cent. of the population, but on a slice of income well above the band at which the top rate applies—in practice at a minimum of £27,000. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where and when?"]

Conservative Members ask where and when that rate would apply. I shall remind them of an exchange in the House last year. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) asked the then deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. and learned Member

for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)—sadly, he is no longer in that capacity—to explain the income tax proposals that would be in the next Budget. The right hon. and learned Gentleman replied:

"In all the questions asked by shadow spokesmen over many years that one beats all records for stupidity. One matter that Chancellors of the Exchequor like, properly, to reserve to their Budget statement is the level at which income tax will be fixed". [*Official Report*, 7 June 1990; Vol. 173, c. 784.]

He also referred to bands, rates and so on. *[Interruption.]*

I would not dream of saying to Conservative Members who are shouting that that is the most stupid question that I have ever heard in the House; I am content to rest on the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes) *rose*——

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West) *rose*——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I do not see any hon. Member who usually makes a serious contribution to these debates. They only want to make silly points, so I do not propose to give way to them.

The Labour party has made it clear many times that the top rate of tax will be charged at 50p in the pound. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should want this on the record. It will be charged at 50p in the pound at a level of income well above the present rate at which 40p is charged. *[Interruption.]* That is all I am prepared to say.

Mr. Michael Brown: Above £25,000?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) is showing his ignorance. The top rate of tax cannot apply now to incomes below £27,000, and he is saying £25,000. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the police?"] I shall deal with policemen in a moment; Conservative Members should not be so impatient.

The Labour party has said clearly that it will lift the ceiling on national insurance contributions. That change, and the introduction of a 50p in the pound rate of tax, will cover the specific spending pledges that we have made on pensions and on child benefit—an increase of £5 for a single pensioner and of £8 for a married couple, and the full increase of child benefit to £9·55 per child.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No. I must move on a little further in my speech. If the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

On the programme side——

Mr. Ian Taylor: What about the police?

Mrs. Beckett: I am coming to that later in my speech. If the hon. Gentleman will be kind enough to bear with me, and—unlike the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) who was calling out earlier—stay for the rest of my speech, I shall address the point that he raises.

I want to set the picture in context. The overall picture includes tax and national insurance changes, pensions and child benefit increases and following that, on the programme side, priorities for investment such as training and education. The Chief Secretary managed on five separate occasions to say in different ways that we have a commitment to make training a priority. That has never been a secret.

On education, we are saying that it is more than time that the percentage of our national wealth devoted to education should begin to increase again, having declined under the Government.

Beyond those early priorities, and by as much as the economy can reasonably afford, we shall address the issues of underfunding that we recognise, for example, in the national health service. A great distance arises between ourselves and the Government on the national health service. We recognise that there is certainly an element of underfunding in the national health service, as there is in the education service. In the face of all the evidence, the Government continue to deny that any problem exists.

That brings us back to the many extremely foolish comments made in public by Conservative Members. Incidentally, they are not the same as the comments that they make in private. Secretaries of State continually stop me and complain that they cannot get my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to make extravagant spending commitments.

I return to the point that I was about to make about the balance between our spending proposals and our overall approach to public spending. The Government's problem—it is a serious problem and I understand it—is that they find it impossible to attack what we are saying, which is straightforward and sensible—*[Interruption.]* They are reduced, with increasing desperation and implausibility, to inventing what they would prefer us to be saying and attacking that instead.

I now come to the point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about what the Government's spending plans indicate. As the hon. Gentleman said, when an election is approaching the Government always say that they will ease up on public spending. In 1983, they had a pre-election spending boom. In July 1983, after the election, they had to have an extra Budget in which the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), announced that spending had got out of hand and had to be reined back. It took until 1985-86 for the Government to attain that goal.

In 1987 the Government realised that the same trick would not work twice, so they tried a new one. They did not have a pre-election boom in spending, but by a remarkable coincidence, they had a pre-election forecast of increases to come. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has already identified, that is precisely what the Government are doing in this year's autumn spending statement. But what happened when the election was safely over? The forecast for 1987 and the subsequent years was an increase in public spending in cash and in real terms. I have no doubt that the Chief Secretary of the day defended that in just the same terms as the present Chief Secretary used today.

Once the election was safely over in 1987, there was a cash increase, I admit. But there was a real-terms fall in public spending in the first year of almost £1 billion. In the second year of the plans, where the forecast before the election had been for a real-terms increase of £3 billion, there was a real-terms cut in public spending of £9 billion. That was a turnround of £12 billion in real terms once the

[Mrs. Beckett]

election was safely out of the way. The Chief Secretary wonders why we doubt the figures in this year's autumn statement.

In these debates, we find ourselves in the position of a new board that has just completed a takeover deal, or almost done so. We know that we are inheriting a mess. We know that the accounts are extremely dodgy, but we do not know exactly where and how the bodies are buried and how great the difficulties are. In those difficult circumstances, some idiot keeps asking us what dividend we will declare at the end of the first year. That is the position in which Conservative Members are putting themselves.

We have already said more and been more honest than the Government, who have a history of obfuscation and deceit. In this debate on public spending, they began by trying to claim that we could not do anything at all without raising the basic rate of tax. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury did so and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury did so. We cannot mention tuppence ha'penny of expenditure without someone saying, "How much will that put on the basic rate of tax?" The insistence that one cannot do anything without raising the basic rate of tax is a lie which we have nailed. That is exactly the point which the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) addressed in a speech which was extremely clear. He said bluntly and specifically that, in any normal year, revenues accrue from growth in real terms.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Not for a second. Only a moment ago, Conservative Members were asking me to answer the point. I am doing so.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn also said that a moderate estimate of the increase that would accrue with 2·5 per cent. growth over five years was about £20 billion. Conservative Members will know that several commentators have estimated that it would be more. However, we wish to be moderate in our observations. My right hon. Friend made it plain that, if one obtains 2·5 per cent. growth in real terms over five years, one obtains revenues of about £20 billion without a ha'penny going on the basic rate of tax. That is the point. If there is less growth, the revenues are smaller. If there is more growth, the revenues are greater.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Sit down. I shall not give way for a second. The Minister has been sitting there harassing, sneering, making a noise and demanding that I answer the point. Now he can wait and let me do it.

Mr. Maude *rose*——

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, not until I have finished the point. I must put this clearly on the record. Conservative Members obviously do not wish me to put it on the record.

It is clear from what my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn said and it is indisputable—indeed, as *The Independent* said, it is "unexceptional"—that, with growth at the level of 2·5 per cent., revenues accrue without raising income tax. The Conservative party has tried to propagate the lie that revenue cannot be increased without increasing income tax. That lie has been nailed.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Lady tell the House of any Labour Government in history who have not raised the basic rate of income tax?

Mrs. Beckett: If we are to be the first Labour Government not to do so, we shall be. *[Interruption.]* The previous Labour Government cut the rate of tax. I have not checked back through the records to see whether there is any accuracy in the Minister's insinuation, but if there is, it will make a change. I shall come to the Minister's accuracy in a moment.

I repeat the point that I have made. Conservative Members seek to say that one cannot have revenues unless one raises the basic rate of income tax. That is a lie. They know it and it will be a lie no matter how many times they repeat it.

Sir David Mitchell: What happens to the hon. Lady's expenditure plans if her taxation plans kill growth? When she has increased taxes and killed growth, how will she finance expenditure?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall come to what happens to growth in a few minutes, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to the point immediately.

When Conservative Members had failed to justify the argument that one cannot increase spending without increasing taxes, we then went through the farce of their claims that one obtains growth sometimes, but not under Labour Governments. Indeed, the point that the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) has just made ties in with that. He implied, as the Minister did, that because Labour Governments have sometimes raised taxes, they do not achieve growth.

I have here the figures for gross domestic product—*[Interruption.]* [HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] I am sure that Conservative Members are anxious to hear this because they have been asking for these figures for some time.

I have the figures for the gross domestic product, at constant 1985 prices, for the past 43 years. They show a fall in GDP in real terms in only five of those years. The first was in 1973-74, when we shared office with the Conservative Government; the second was in 1975, when we were in office, but, according to the arguments of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, that makes no difference because the first two years do not count. The third occasion was in 1980. Perhaps we shall take half the blame for that, as the Minister gives us the first two years of the 1974-75 figure. The fourth occasion was 1981 and the fifth was 1991.

Whatever happened to rates of tax or other parts of the economy, Conservative Members must know that those are the facts. It is not only untrue but pathetically untrue to try to pretend, as they have done recently with ever-increasing volume, as the quality of their argument has deteriorated, that there has never been growth under a Labour Government. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who boasted about how he checks his figures, was the first to make that statement, but it is not true. When he first said it, I made the charitable assumption that he had been caught on the hop, had come out with a smart

remark and had realised subsequently that it was nonsense. That could happen to anyone but it seems to happen to him more than most.

However, the Prime Minister was not caught on the hop when he said, on 9 May:

"The reality is that the Labour party would never deliver any growth whatsoever to fund increased public expenditure. It never has and never would".—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 820.]

The Prime Minister was certainly not speaking off the cuff, yet his remarks were totally untrue.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, there is nothing on which to give way, because the facts are plain. There has been as much growth under Labour Governments as under Tory ones.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she is not giving way at the moment.

Mrs. Beckett: The figures show that, under the last Labour Government, for example, on whom an oil price increase was inflicted from outside these shores, which quadrupled oil prices without increasing revenues from oil, the average rate of growth was 2 per cent. Under this Government, taking the whole period and not the periods that they choose to select, growth is 1·75 per cent. So they are in no position to criticise us.

Conservative Members keep attacking the Labour party's position and saying that we are being less than honest.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will the hon. Lady give way on the subject of water?

Mrs. Beckett: No.

On the subject of honest accounting, I invite honest John Major to step forward. On Wednesday, 23 May 1990, he was set on by the then Chancellor of the Duchy because he was attacking Labour's spending plans. An unkind and improperly briefed journalist then asked the then Chancellor of the Exchequer—the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—about his taxation spending plans. *The Independent* of that date said:

"Mr. Major declined to pledge that the Tories would not abolish the married man's allowance, or to put a date on reducing basic rate tax to 20p."

In July 1990, the then Chancellor said to the Welsh Conservative party:

"Let me give you a flavour"

of some of these terrible Labour pledges.

"They intend to freeze the married couple's allowance. That would make all married couples in this country, 24 million people, worse off."

In March 1991, the Chancellor said:

"I am not proposing to increase the married couple's allowance for couples under 65 or the allowances that are linked to it."—[*Official Report*, 19, March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 179]

So much for honest John on the married couple's allowance.

In July 1990, the same honest John attacked the Labour party for its proposal to

"meddle with mortgage interest relief"—

by which he meant our intention not to allow extra relief above the basic rate of VAT.

On the Frost programme in January 1991, Mr. Frost said, in a straightforward manner, that mortgage interest relief had been safe in the hands of the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)

"even with higher rate taxpayers".

He then asked:

"Is it safe in your hands . . . ?"

The present Prime Minister answered:

"The matters you're moving into now, and I can give you very clear answers, but you're moving now into matters that are budgetary matters, but we have no plans to change . . . what happened in the past, but I can't give you guarantees about this or any other matter. That is not to indicate that there are going to be changes . . . I can't give you guarantees about that anymore than anyone else could."

Mr. Frost then summed up the Prime Minister's reply as:

"Right, no guarantees but at the moment, as of now, we have no plans to change that",

and the Prime Minister said "That is correct".

In March 1991, in his Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed that mortgage interest relief "should be allowed only at the basic rate."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 178.]

So much for the honesty and frankness of the Conservative party in putting its plans before the country.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I shall not give way.

The Conservative party has made much of our plans for the top rate of tax, and 50p is well above the current top rate. I shall repeat the figures, because the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) does not seem to be very well informed. He thinks that the top rate of tax applies at £25,000. The current top rate of tax of 40p in the pound affects 6·5 per cent. of taxpayers and does not apply in practice to incomes below £27,000. That is for a single person with only one personal allowance and no mortgage. Beyond that, those with a married couple's allowance or a mortgage will probably pay the present top rate at £30,000 or more.

The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East said that only an idiot would try to ask any Chancellor or shadow Chancellor to say what the rates and bands of the tax system should be. I rest content with the right hon. Gentleman's judgment.

Mr. Michael Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I shall not.

Conservative Members suggest that the combination of national insurance and top rate tax changes would be damaging and would cause a brain drain, with middle management fleeing the country. If that is true, why are they all still here? Why did they not leave the country before 1988? They were paying 60p in the pound until mid-1988. Under a Labour Government, some—not as many—would be paying perhaps 59p in the pound.

The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) is keen for me to talk about national insurance contributions, and I am happy to do so. He asked about the impact of national insurance contributions on teachers.

Mr. Quentin Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady keeps asking questions and when we attempt to answer them she will not give way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she is not giving way. The hon. Gentleman should try to catch my eye later.

Mrs. Beckett: The ceiling of national insurance contributions for teachers is £20,300. The average salary for teachers in primary education is £16,279 and the average salary for teachers in secondary education is £17,166.

Between 10 and 15 per cent. of teachers at most would be affected by the change in national insurance contributions. It is impossible to assess exactly how many would be affected because they would be affected only if they received either London or incentive allowances, or both. Most of the people who will rise above the ceiling when they receive those allowances are in groups just above the national insurance contribution ceiling so the effects on them are small. An article in the *Daily Mail* said that the change would be a disincentive and great blow for somone earning slightly above the ceiling, but the loss for the example they gave would be about £50 or £60 a year, which is less than the cost of buying the *Daily Mail* for a year.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Many teachers in my constituency will be fascinated by that answer, because they are highly qualified teachers—some of them are even headmistresses. They will notice that the Labour party's plans to remove the upper limit on national insurance will cost them several hundred pounds at the levels they earn. If the hon. Lady believes that that is an isolated incident in the south-east, she should look closely at teachers right across the country who will be similarly affected. Some 2·11 million basic rate tax payers in this country will be savagely impacted by what the hon. Lady proposes for the upper rate national insurance.

Mrs. Beckett: That was a lot of huffing and puffing, but it does not alter the fact that the figures on schoolteachers show that, on average, their salaries are £16,000 for those in primary education and £17,000 for those in secondary education. Some teachers, but not very many, will be affected by lifting the national insurance contribution ceiling.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Just a moment.

We have never denied that some teachers will be affected; nor have we tried—unlike Conservative Members—to conceal from them the impact that the changes will have. We want teachers to know what a Labour Government would propose and we want them to know where the money will go. Many of the teachers whose income is near the ceiling and will rise above it, will be net gainers from the switch from national insurance contributions when the sum is pooled into child benefit —another fact that the hon. Member for Esher forgot. A small number of teachers will be affected, and only if they receive incentives.

Mr. Knapman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I want to finish this point, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman eventually.

Conservative Members also mentioned nurses. I do not know why they bother with all this fuss because we know —they must know in their heart of hearts—that only a small number of people in those employment categories will be affected. I do not know who Conservative Members think that they are conning. When the people who work in teaching, nursing and the groups that Conservative Members mentioned, hear the figures, they think, "I do not earn that—what on earth are they on about?" There is no point in Conservative Members trying to deceive people.

A typical staff nurse earns between £10,000 and £15,600 a year—no more than 3 per cent. of all nurses, even including London weighting, could possibly be affected by the abolition of the ceiling. About 12 per cent. of police officers—the other group mentioned—might possibly be affected by the abolition. Most ordinary police officers would not be affected by the change.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) accused me of asking rhetorical questions. I do not recall asking Conservative Members any questions at all, but I shall ask them one now. Why should a police constable pay national insurance contributions on his earnings, while his superior—a police inspector or police sergeant—does not? What is right or just about that? Will Conservative Members defend that?

Mr. Tim Smith: I am astonished that the hon. Lady does not understand the answer to that. We are talking about a national insurance contribution scheme that has a ceiling on the amount of pension that can be paid. It is a contributory scheme, and it is right that the contributions should be related to the amount of pension.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman talks about what has happened to the pension ceiling. He has picked a particularly unfortunate case. It was precisely the difference between the pensions and earnings of police officers that was so severely affected by this Government, who made unilateral cuts and changes in breach of contract. From the hon. Gentleman's point of view, it is a great pity that he brought up that case. The Government have treated police officers very badly over pensions.

My basic point is simple. At present, we have a system where there can be two people living in one household who earn £20,000 each and pay national insurance contributions on the total £40,000 income, and next door one person who earns £40,000 pays national insurance contributions on half that income. That is unjust and illogical.

This Government increased those national insurance contributions from 6·5 to 9 per cent. This Government have lifted the ceiling on employers' contributions, thereby loading the effect on business costs right through the earnings range. This Government have applied national insurance contributions to company cars.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman seeks to make such silly points. He knows perfectly well that we are discussing the fact that we are going to raise the ceiling.

Last week I challenged the Chief Secretary and asked him whether, as the Government had lifted the ceiling on employers' national insurance contributions and were making criticisms, would he give a categorical undertaking that the Government would not, in this Parliament, or in the unlikely event of their having the opportunity in the next, lift the ceiling on employee contributions? Will he give us that undertaking?

The Prime Minister made criticisms of the married couple's allowance and the extra mortgage interest relief—and then the Government implemented that policy——

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I am perfectly prepared to give way if the hon. Gentleman is prepared to tell me whether the Government will lift the ceiling on national insurance contributions. If he is not prepared to do so, I shall not give way but shall wait for an assurance from Ministers. They charged us about the married couple's allowance, they attacked us on mortgage relief and are now attacking us on national insurance contributions, but what about all the poor nurses and teachers about whom they made such a fuss a moment ago?

Mr. Tim Smith: This is outrageous—that is Labour party policy.

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, it is our policy and we are prepared to stand by it—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It does not help the House or the hon. Lady when hon. Members from each side of the House are shouting at each other.

Mrs. Beckett: I have one last thing to say about national insurance contributions. Not only do all the people involved know that we are making this proposal, but they know that we are pledged to do it and they know where the money is going. The money is going to pensioners and families with children—where it is very much needed. People can make their decision in the light of the very clear choice that we are setting before them. Labour's policies involve no deceit and hiding.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Lady says that people know where the money is going, but do they understand that the Labour party regards education as its first priority, training as a key priority, Government support for manufacturing investment as a key priority and spending 0·7 per cent. of GNP on overseas aid as a top priority? To which of those priorities is the money going? Is it to go to them all? Will the hon. Lady answer the question that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary asked her? Are those matters all priorities? If not, which are not priorities?

Mrs. Beckett: I suggest that the Financial Secretary should read *Hansard* and see what I said earlier. I have already answered that question twice and see no point in answering it for a third time.

I shall now return to the Government's plans because I have been speaking for long enough. They contain the flaw at the heart of the Government's case, which is that there is a choice between cuts in income tax and cuts in public services or increases in value added tax—or, under this Government, both.

On the "Today" programme the other morning, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) was asked about the demands of the welfare state and what he described as the Government's ambitious programmes for cuts in direct taxation. He said that it was quite simple:

"Any attempt to reduce income tax to 20p in the pound will have to be phased over a considerable period of time and in my view, it is as likely to be in the context that we decide that we're going to be taxed more in our spending capacity and less in our earning capacity and as evidence for that I would point just to the recent Budget, where the decision was taken to increase VAT and to increase excise duties but not to increase income tax."

Mr. Knapman: I understand that the principal contribution to economic affairs of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is an annual consultation with his abacus, but does the £20 billion which has suddenly been manufactured include the money to be used to renationalise the water companies?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have already addressed the point about the £20 billion several times. The hon. Gentleman knows that we are saying that that is an illustrative figure of the revenues that come from growth without having to raise taxes.

The hon. Member for Stroud asked me about water. We have made it extremely plain that, although we think that, in the long term, the water industry belongs in the public sector, it is not one of the policies that we expect to implement soon after coming to power. We intend to tighten regulations and try to ensure that the water industry is responsive to public need.

There is a question mark in the much longer term over the pattern of control of the water industry. There are those who argue that there should be more regional control than control from the centre. That question would arise in overall discussions about the shape of regional government and the powers that may be devolved from central Government. The hon. Gentleman will readily recognise that the debate about the shape of the industry is a matter for the longer term.

There is a strong possibility that the Government will increase VAT to pay for their income tax cuts—that is, if they do not now say that they will discard them, which is always a possibility. Income tax cuts have to be paid for either by cuts in public services or by increases in VAT, national insurance contributions or something else. Lest anyone imagine that Conservative Members have no track record on the issue, let me remind the House of what the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East said in the general election campaign on 21 April 1979. He said that he would like to correct "inexcusable errors" in a Labour party-political broadcast of the time; and added:

"We have absolutely no intention of doubling VAT."

Seven and a half weeks later, almost to the day, in his Budget, he raised VAT from 8 to 15 per cent. I concede that that was not exactly doubling it, but if the Financial Secretary wishes to tell the British people that the Government will not raise VAT to 22 per cent., but they might raise it to 21 or 21·5 per cent., or even to 23 per cent., all of which are compatible with denying that they intend to raise it to 22 per cent., I am sure that the British people would be interested to hear it.

Let us come back to reading the book, as the Chief Secretary earlier invited us to. The Government boast—the Chief Secretary was at it today—that they have funded public services not just adequately but generously. They must believe that their funding is generous, because they have so often, even in the boom years, put in less than the economy could afford. Under this Government, the inspectors have identified dilapidation in schools that will cost £3 billion to £4 billion to put right. Under this Government, for the first time ever, paper sheets and pillow cases have appeared in hospitals; and waiting lists have soared. Under this Government, some trains have become not just a disgrace but death traps.

[Mrs. Beckett]

The Labour party promises no miracles and no magic wand. We tell the electorate bluntly that it will take years to repair the damage and restore the neglect of these years, and that many of the scars will always show. I do not usually use large chunks of other people's words in my speeches, but I read a *Daily Mirror* editorial on Friday which should be shared with the House, especially with Conservative Members, who almost certainly do not read the *Daily Mirror*. That editorial did what the Chief Secretary asked us to do and looked around at the consequences of 12 years of Tory rule:

"Look at the rising toll of the unemployed and be thankful for the present figure, for it will not stop increasing before it reaches three million.

Look at the schools whose walls are crumbling and whose pupils lack the textbooks to teach them the basics of learning and be grateful that they are being taught anything at all.

Look at the homeless in the centres of London, Manchester and the other great cities of these islands and wonder why they don't go out and get a mortgage.

Look at the traffic perpetually stuck in jams because spending on the road system has been neglected and ask why they can't be bothered to walk.

Look at the squalor of British Rail, the late trains, the dirty carriages . . . which itself is an eloquent testimony . . .

Look outside your door at the rubbish in the streets, the lamps which don't light, and the police who are not there. Examine your bills for water and gas and electricity, all outrageously increased because the Government wanted to privatise to feather the nests of its friends.

Look at the profits which have been made in the City of London and then look at the losses of those living in bed and breakfast hostels because they have been evicted.

Look at the endless queues for the NHS, while doctors and nurses are being sacked.

Feel the pain of those who need operations but cannot get them, at least not for years.

Look. Feel. See. Use your own experience, your own knowledge."

We want the people of this country to read the book of the Government's record.

Sir David Mitchell *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I will not give way. I am on my last sentence.

We share the Chief Secretary's view that the people of this country should read the book of the Government's record, as set out in their public expenditure history and forecasts; and when they have read it, they should resolve to turn a new page and elect a new Government.

5.36 pm

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): In the public expenditure White paper the Government have set out clearly their plans for the coming years. Like many other Members, I came to the House this afternoon in the hope that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) would explain with equal clarity what the Labour party planned to do if they got into Government. I am sorry to say that we have been seriously disappointed, because, although several of my hon. Friends intervened to ask pertinent questions, and the hon. Lady said that she would deal with those matters later in her speech, in the end she managed to avoid answering them. So I must ask her some of those questions again.

Over the past hour we have been waiting for an explanation of some of the extraordinary things that Opposition economic spokesmen have said on behalf of their party. I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition can be classed as one of the Labour party's economic spokesmen, but in view of his role it is fair to assume that what he says carries the authority of the party that he leads.

The first matter which the hon. Lady made even more unclear than it was before she spoke was the status of the £20 billion that the economy would yield for public expenditure in relation to the Government's published expenditure plans. That £20 billion is much less than the figure in the Government's public expenditure plans. If the labour party is substituting that figure for the Government's, what will it cut to get spending down to £20 billion from the £38 billion Government figure? The hon. Lady has not explained that, although she was repeatedly asked to do so.

Mrs. Beckett: I must intervene to save the right hon. Gentleman more embarrassment. I made it plain that there is no direct comparison—and certainly there is no comparison between the figures that he mentions. The £38 billion that he cites is cash, whereas the £20 billion is in real terms.

Mr. Stewart: In real terms the figures still come out as a substantial part of the £20 billion. The crucial question is: does the hon. Lady argue that the £20 billion is a substitute for the figure in the White Paper, or is it meant to be additional?

Mrs. Beckett: I made it absolutely clear that our figure had nothing to do with the figures in the White Paper. It is an illustration of the fact that 2·5 per cent. growth over five years would yield about £20 billion in revenues. No suggestion of a comparison was made by my right hon. Friend. Only Conservative Members, through stupidity or malice, are trying to make such a connection.

Mr. Stewart: If there is no connection, why on earth did the leader of the Labour party quote the figures?

Mrs. Beckett: I have told the right hon. Gentleman this four times and I will tell him a fifth. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was responding to the lie put about by Conservative Members that the only way to get revenues for extra public spending was by increasing the basic rate of income tax. That is not true and it never has been true. I trust that it never will be true—unless the Government stay in power for longer and we have a recession every year.

In a normal year, there is growth. With 2·5 per cent. growth, on a moderate estimate, there can be £20 billion for spending. If there is less growth, there is less money; if there is more growth there is more money. We can get more revenues, therefore, without raising the basic rate of tax. *[Interruption.]* The Financial Secretary says that we have never done that, but he knows that it is untrue. Is he trying to ruin his reputation? He must realise that members of the general public who are economically literate and follow such debates are well aware that there is growth under every Government, whether Labour or Conservative. He makes a fool of himself by pretending otherwise.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her lecture. I did not need it, because I know a fair bit about these matters. The Leader of the Opposition claims that £20 billion will be available for public expenditure out of

growth. Does that substitute for the hon. Lady's commitment to public expenditure out of growth that is already contained in Government figures? If the Leader of the Opposition has not explained that to the shadow Chief Secretary, it is no wonder that the Opposition are getting a bad press on their handling of their economic plans.

The hon. Member for Derby, South should have clarified matters, but she avoided the question whether revenue from future growth in the economy is regarded by the Opposition as extra money that is available for public expenditure. If it is not, why on earth is she, as shadow Chief Secretary, allowing her colleagues to go up and down the country saying that every single area of public expenditure that they can think of is a top or key priority?

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend speaks about Opposition spending pledges. In the presence of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the shadow spokesman on transport, said in Derby at the beginning of the month that a Labour Government would electrify the main line all the way to the midlands to bring benefits to Derby. Presumably that is a first-line priority pledge. Does the hon. Lady deny that?

Mr. Stewart: I do not know what the hon. Lady will deny or confirm. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that this was an overriding priority. Is an overriding priority greater than a top priority and is a top priority more or less important than a key priority? We have heard that water privatisation has a low priority.

Mr. John Garrett: What does the right hon. Gentleman think of the Government's spending plans?

Mr. Stewart: They are sensible in relation to the available resources. They are a continuation of record public expenditure carried out over 12 years during which we have been able to reduce the rate of income tax and reduce, and for a time eliminate, borrowing, of which we inherited a great deal from the last Labour Government. Through careful control of overall public expenditure, we have been able to increase public expenditure in key areas.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) should reply to the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) about a pledge made in Derby in the hon. Lady's presence? Many people in the east midlands suspect that it is the sort of pledge that Labour, if it ever came to power, would not be able to redeem. Would there be a firm pledge by an incoming Labour Government that the midland main line would be electrified? The hon. Lady must say yes or no to that question.

Mr. Stewart: I will happily give way to the hon. Lady if she wishes to respond. She does not. Did the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East consult the hon. Lady before he said that such a major commitment was an overriding priority? What about the other commitments? Did the hon. Lady speak to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) before he said that education was Labour's first priority? Which comes first, a first priority or an overriding priority? One would think that an overriding priority would take precedence over even a first priority.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) says that education and training are key priorities. If Labour's spending commitments are to appear credible, the Opposition must tell us whether they categorically repudiate all the priorities spread about the country by Labour spokesmen. If those priorities are not commitments, spokesmen have no right to say that they are key, top and overriding priorities.

The same thing always happens under Labour Governments. As soon as they are elected they go on a spending binge, because before elections all their spokesmen go round the country saying that more spending on this and that is a top, a key, an overriding or a first priority. They cannot be held at bay. It is not possible for a Labour Government to finance such spending commitments without increasing the burden of taxation.

The Opposition have an extra difficulty. They have said that they would not proceed with our plans for privatisation which, over the next three years, will produce £5·5 billion each year. That is a total of £16·5 billion and almost gobbles up the Opposition's £20 billion before they have even started. Where will a Labour Government get that money? They will either have to cut spending in other areas of public expenditure, raise taxes or increase borrowing. That is because the Opposition have not focused on the fact that a public expenditure programme must be identified in advance and must be within the means of the Government to fund it. Everything that the Opposition have said about priorities fails to meet those criteria. It is completely dishonest to speak about top priorities when there is no intention in the foreseeable future of doing anything about them.

Much of the hon. Lady's speech was devoted to the White Paper. She said there was not enough expenditure on health, education and transport, and she was robustly supported by her hon. Friends. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that much more should be spent on transport, health and education. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that a great deal more should be spent on local government. How would a Labour Government cope with that, when the Opposition say that they are committed to spending on only two matters and that all the others are for the birds?

Anyone who reads Lord Barnett's book about the experience of the Labour Government in the 1970s will see that any Labour Chief Secretary will find pressure to increase public expenditure irresistible. Those irresistible pressures to increase public expenditure would inevitably result in financial problems which could be solved only by tax increases or by borrowing. If public sector borrowing is increased to fund such extravagant commitments, the debt service burden will increase not only immediately, but for all the years ahead. That adds to the increases in public expenditure to which Labour is committed.

One reason why we have been able to restrain public expenditure in recent years and have been able to devote more money to useful functions in the public service instead of to debt interest is that we have reduced the public sector borrowing requirement and have repaid a substantial part of the national debt. As soon as the process goes into reverse, it becomes not a virtuous circle but a vicious one, and public expenditure increases year by year to service the extra money borrowed.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman will surely concede that the documents that we are debating do precisely that—they put the process into reverse. The documents show a substantial public sector borrowing requirement for reasons that arise out of the recession.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman's final words explain the position. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) explained a few years ago that the Government's policy, over time, was to have a balanced budget. In some years of the economic cycle there will be a surplus, but in others there will be a deficit. Public expenditure cannot be increased in absolute terms without increasing taxation or borrowing to pay for it.

In recent years, the Labour party has said that interest rates are too high and should come down whatever their level has been. If the amount of borrowing is increased, there will have to be higher interest rates than would otherwise be the case. That is an inevitable consequence which again increases the burden on public expenditure. It is likely that the Labour party's solution would be the same as in the past. There would be major increases in taxation on incomes.

I well remember that, during the first general election campaign in 1974, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said that he would raise taxes on the rich and squeeze them until the pips squeaked. He did not say at that time that his definition of the rich included those with below average earnings. That is always the way, because the majority of taxpayers are at the lower end of the scale. If a significant amount of extra money is to be raised from income tax, it is not sufficient to pile on high rates at the top end. If extra revenue is to be raised, taxes have to be increased throughout the scale. That is what the Labour party did in the 1960s and 1970s, and the only reason why it did not do so in the 1980s was that it was not in a position to do so.

The hon. Member for Derby, South told us to examine the evidence of the past. However, Labour Governments have traditionally and invariably increased public expenditure sharply and increased tax rates on average incomes. That would happen again. The hon. Lady has shown that the arithmetic in the Labour party's financial plans cannot be trusted. It says that it could spend more without increasing the tax burden on ordinary people. That is a false prospectus. The Labour party has been rumbled in the House and it will be rumbled in the country. What happened in the past could happen again.

High public expenditure and high taxation are a way of life for the Labour party. It has said nothing today to change our view of what it would do if it were ever in power again.

5.53 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): First, I shall refer to the form of the public expenditure document, because nobody else is likely to and because I believe that, as in architecture, form should follow function, but the function of the reports is to obscure the facts. It is remarkable that we conduct these debates as if the departmental reports made any sense at all. I shall shortly demonstrate that they do not.

I am in the 23rd year of a campaign to require the Treasury and other Departments to set out not only what they are spending in each programme, but their objectives and the outcomes of past programmes. I first raised the issue with the Procedure Committee in 1969, and in that year the first public expenditure White Paper had 81 pages, with one page each for health and welfare and one page for defence, and very helpful it was too.

This White Paper has 1,500 pages in 20 volumes. It costs £200, so some university departments are unable to afford it. If one adds the estimates, the appropriation accounts, the next steps agency report, the next steps agency framework documents and the trading fund reports, 3,000 pages are now produced annually on spending. But there is hardly more information that we had in 1969.

There is no reason why the estimates and the appropriation accounts could not be organised in columns against each of the spending programmes. The first year's programme is next year's estimates, and last year's completed programme is last year's appropriation account. That would save 28 volumes of information.

When Treasury officials were asked in the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service why there had to be 28 extra volumes, they could not answer. They had never asked the Committee whether the information was required in the estimates or the Public Accounts Committee or the Comptroller and Auditor General whether the information was needed on the appropriation accounts.

Many of the reports are drab, with a few hazy graphs. Of all the Departments, the Home Office has produced a volume which would not look out of place in the reception area of an advertising agency. Graphic graphs are printed over pictures of prisoners at work, over what appears to be a fire in a chip pan, over computers, with a signed foreword topped by a photograph of a smiling Home Secretary. The report by the Office of Arts and Libraries, which has a spend of £500 million, has 34 pages—20 per cent. longer that the report by the Ministry of Defence which spends £22,000 million.

The report from the Ministry of Defence is largely narrative, with virtually no analytical back-up. It says that its efficiency programme to improve the cost of that great Ministry by 2·5 per cent. a year is going well, and it gives us some descriptive examples such as cancelling the overhaul of nine aero engines. A Department that spends £22,000 million tells us that it had forgone the overhaul of nine aero engines. The report does not provide any basis for parliamentary scrutiny of efficiency. It tells us that its new management strategy will be set out in a departmental plan which will include objectives and performance measures, but it fails to tell us whether that plan will be published.

The best report is that of the Inland Revenue, and it is called a management plan. It sets out its purposes and aims, its management strategies, its capital spending by project and such efficiency indicators as the cost per pound collected in revenue, the cost per taxpayer, and a wide variety of measures of past and future performance.

Elsewhere, the information can only be described as haphazard and whimsical. The reports usually set out in great detail what they are spending, but there are few meaningful indicators of their targets or what has been achieved in the past. A few examples will give the flavour. The Minister for the Civil Service gives the ratings on, for example, accommodation and catering given to the Civil Service college by its students. However, it does not

mention or report any progress on equal opportunities policies in the service—a matter for which it has responsibility.

The Department of Employment record no objectives for youth or employment training, and I am not surprised, given the cuts in those services. It gives no information on the placement of young people gaining qualifications or jobs. It explains that those targets will be agreed later with training and enterprise councils, as if it had no responsibility whatsoever for setting them.

The huge report of the Department of the Environment —the largest, at 178 pages—sets out page after page of detail on future spending, but contains no past analyses or future targets for the improvement of, for example, the quality of air or water. It reports its interest in preserving the landscape, but fails to report the extent of damage or destruction to sites of special scientific interest. It mentions the extent of homelessness, but offers no indication of how much it expects to reduce it. We are told at length of the Department's spending on inner cities, but we are given no clue to what improvements it is aiming at in quality of life for their residents.

The Department of Social Security report informs the reader of the ways in which take-up rates for benefits can be calculated, but gives no analysis of what they are, or of how they might be improved.

There are many useful statistics in the Department of Health's volume—statistics on the costs of its services, the number of out-patient attendances, the average length of in-patient episodes, immunisation take-up rates, general practitioner list sizes and prescription costs. It contains mortality rates for a number of diseases, and targets for coronary grafts, hip replacements, cataract operations and bone marrow transplants. Unfortunately, all those series of figures end in 1989 or 1990, so there are no indicators of how the Government expect them to improve. We are told what special funds have been allocated to reduce waiting list sizes, which is a key indicator, but we are given no idea by how much the Department expects them to be reduced.

Those of us who have argued for the past 20-odd years that public expenditure White Papers should set out as many spending programmes as possible, and should give the social and economic indicators which will enable us to know the objectives of spending, can only record dismay at all this, as these first departmental reports are ridiculous. They either mean that Departments are trying to swamp the reader with meaningless numbers or, what is more likely, they simply poured into them any old figures that they had to hand—except for the Treasury, which reported virtually nothing.

The Treasury's slender report has an interesting selectivity; it grandly informs the reader that one of its objectives is to maintain a general oversight of the financial system and to help maintain its integrity. Another aim is to manage Government debts and financial assets effectively and prudently. That is very worth while, and we understand that those are two of the Treasury's jobs. Therefore, one might have expected the report to include some measures relating to City failures and the effectiveness of investor protection, or to the Treasury's competence on debt management and custody of assets. However, a suggestion to that effect in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee was greeted with surprise by Treasury officials.

On the other hand, the Treasury report tells the reader about the productivity of pay clerks in the Chessington computer centre, and offers an unintelligible graph, showing the caseload of clerical staff in the pensions administration office. The Treasury does not tell us anything about its grand duties of safeguarding Government's debts and financial assets, but tells us in great detail what some poor clerk achieved in the Chessington computer office or the pensions administration office. That is typical of the amateurism that has always run through the British civil service, especially the Treasury, whose mandarins are only too happy to apply measurement to the work of their clerical staff, but not to themselves.

The presentation of statistical indicators reaches a somewhat eccentric peak in the report of the Welsh Office, which is one of the best of the departmental reports. There is a section on "Indicators of a Healthy Lifestyle," between 1985-88, which records the percentages of the Welsh population using semi-skimmed milk and eating fruit daily. *[Laughter.]*

There is promise of more to come, as the section on indicators of health tells us that the Department is considering the production of an indicator on emotional health and relationships. In a future report, we shall see a performance indicator of emotional health and family relationships among the people of Wales, but the Treasury will not tell us how it proposes to manage the nation's assets.

Really, these reports are merely a mandarin's playpen —they do not make any sense at all. They threw in any statistic they could find, and it is ridiculous that we are expected to treat them seriously.

Last week in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, the Treasury said that each report set out for each Department a set of ordered priorities and the criteria by which policy changes are assessed, but it could not find an example of either. There is no example of either in any of those in the departmental reports, yet they are required of Departments by the Treasury.

Not surprisingly, the Treasury also told us that the division concerned with applying quality controls to these reports does not have a management accountant in its employ, and it hopes to seek the advice of management accountants from somewhere else. It is no wonder that this kind of information is nonsense.

Our Select Committee would be well advised to take this matter seriously. We are being swamped with information in reports which carefully omit the information we need if we are to scrutinise the work of the Departments.

This week, the National Audit Office reported the Treasury as saying that it was satisfied with performance indicators in 26 of the 34 Departments. In other words, the Treasury is perfectly happy with what we are getting. I guess that these reports are the state of the art as far as the Treasury is concerned, and we are not going to get any more. Select Committees should watch that carefully.

I shall refer only to one programme as an example of the content of the White Paper, because it is of special concern and it is referred to in our amendment. The report of the Department of Employment reveals a real-terms cut in youth training of £100 million in the next three years, at a time when the automatic pilot running our economy will take unemployment to 2·5 million this autumn, and it is quite likely that it will reach 3 million this winter.

[Mr. John Garrett]

If ever an increase in spending were needed, it is needed now. That is a typical counter-cyclical investment; one pours money into training when the economy is down, so that when it revives one has a properly skilled work force who are capable of taking advantage of the revival.

In my constituency, there is great concern about the effects of cuts in employment training. Employment training courses have been cut from one year to 26 weeks. Mr. Bill Wood, the vice-chair of the association of training organisations in my area, has said:

"The whole thing is a shambles . . . The unemployed people are just the fall guys."

Growing redundancies have meant that many people who need retraining, on ET, no longer fall within the Government's guarantee of access to training, and many unemployed people will receive none.

The recession also means that there is much less opportunity for work experience placements, which have almost dried up in my constituency. Since 1989-90, there have been constant cuts in the basic rate of funding for each training week. That is supposed to be replaced by output-related funding, but only a quarter of trainees in Norwich complete their full entitlement of training to gain recognised qualifications, so they do not qualify for output-related funding.

Most trainees have special needs and cannot reach the vocational qualifications, on which funding depends. They have special needs, which are simply not recognised by the funding of training. In other words, training schemes are being cut and fewer people are being trained. Training programmes should be a high priority for public spending, and the Government are not giving them that priority. When the recession ends, we shall be in the more competitive world of 1992, and our workers will be much less equipped to face the challenges from our competitors.

The Government's attitude to training is folly, but it is part of a wider folly. The Department of Trade and Industry budget, in the first year of this programme. loses 20 per cent.—£250 million in real terms—in 1991-92, when support for industrial innovation is needed more than ever. Government spending on education is to fall by 5 per cent. in real terms in the same year—1991-92. Education spending has fallen from 5·5 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 to 4·6 per cent. of GDP in 1990. What a thing to have to admit at this time, when we need skilled workers and properly educated young people. Instead of doing that, the Government are cutting and cutting the education budget.

Last weekend, I attended the court of the univeristy of East Anglia. The vice-chancellor made it clear that standards would have to fall because, with no increase in funding, there would have to be another 8 per cent. or so increase in the number of students. Apart from being useless from a management point of view, these departmental reports are useless in every other way.

It is amazing that the Treasury has never caught on to how to organise management information, even though budgetary control was invented in 1919. One would have expected that by now we should have had a budgetary control system that would give the results of Government spending, compared with the objectives. The departmental reports show a fundamental neglect of public investment in training, industry and education—just the programme areas in which we need to invest for our future if we are to remain in the first rank of European nations.

6.10 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): I do not intend to take up immediately the points made by the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) but I listened with great interest to what he had to say about this series of reports. The first issue that I wanted to raise was exactly that—their sheer weight, size and cost.

First, however, may I refer to something that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said? She referred to the whole philosophy of cuts. I cannot help but reflect on the fact that on almost every occasion in recent years when we have held debates such as this, the definition of the term "cut" has become more and more complex, difficult and political. If a child's £1 pocket money were raised to £2, he would probably regard that as an increase both in money and in real terms. If, however, he went home and said that his little friend Frederick had got an increase of £2 in his pocket money, he would probably regard his own increase in pocket money as a cut in real terms. I believe that that sort of psychology is being bruited about for political purposes. It is reasonable that that should happen in a political debate.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary put his finger on the most important subject that can be discussed in this debate: that all this points to the need for quality and effectiveness in public expenditure. As he said, there is no escaping the difficulty of such decisions, but they must be better informed.

There are two aspects to that better information, one of which I shall summarise briefly. Trained statisticians know —there are many thousands of them in Government service, and thousands of them in industry—that many of the figures bruited about in economic debates concerning employment, unemployment, gross national product, and so on are subject to what are known as statistical limits of error. It is a very precise and well defined term. What it means is that we cannot rely on such aggregates in the case of something like gross national product, where we are talking about £560,000 million and that figure being accurate to, plus or minus, about 5 per cent. If my arithmetic is correct, 5 per cent. of £560,000 million is something like, plus or minus, £28 billion. All the figures, therefore, that try to conclude that there will or will not be £20 billion available in the near future and that it will or will not be allocated in this way, should be subjected to the most cautious qualification.

I turn to the main matters that have arisen in the past and that will continue to arise concerning the vast and almost incomprehensible question of public expenditure. They give rise to what I believe to be three dangerous myths. The hon. Member for Norwich, South touched on this, because he is interested in parliamentary scrutiny. First it is a dangerous myth that Parliament at the moment continues to be an effective controller of the public interest when it comes to expenditure. Secondly, there is the growing impact of the pervasive but unrealistic myth of so-called underfunding—again, something on which there are many political views. Thirdly, perhaps the most serious misconception of all is that a pound redistributed via the fiscal and social security system is equal in value and public merit to a pound denied, for example, to basic science or

fundamental research, technology transfer, the recognition and encouragement throughout our society of excellence, and the public's perception of its real interest. I suggest that these are very different values.

May I begin with a visible and physical illustration of what I mean by Parliament's inability to control public expenditure, to which the hon. Member for Norwich, South referred? In voicing it, I do not wish for a moment to denigrate what I believe to be the immense and continous effort of the Chairmen and members of the Public Accounts Committee and the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on the subject. They do extremely valuable work. In fairness, however, it ought to be added that much of that work is done by the overworked Clerks who serve those Committees.

Here is the record—20 volumes. I believe that the hon. Member for Norwich, South has added a few more volumes to that number. I worked it out that they amount to 1,400 pages, costing over £200. They were published a couple of weeks before the Budget and they set the pattern well ahead to 1993-94. I imagine that I was not alone in being appalled, if not surprised, when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced that they could not be discussed before the Budget. This, he implied—correctly—was for next year's Budget and beyond—tablets not of stone but of software and printers' ink.

Some assiduous Members—doubtless many of them are much more assiduous than I—may since publication have read from cover to cover one or two of these reports. Some of them may have written to the Minister concerned expressing critical or constructive views on the detail. Those views will vary widely. Moreover, what is regarded as constructive in this House will also vary widely. None the less, that is our task. Some hon. Members may rest content with a wet towel, a stiff brandy and the 122-page summary that costs about £17. If any hon. Member has read the lot and written to several Ministers, I should gladly give way to his or her intervention. This is part of the massive information overload that is generated by a system that probably went beyond the control of any single individual or any institution—certainly of this place—at about the time of the first world war.

What do we control, if anything, here? I suggest that for this House it is a very eclectic choice. We grumble about the total expenditure of particular Departments and suggest, according to our political preferences, that defence should give way to health, or social welfare, or vice versa. We tend to exhibit—as I shall doubtless do in a few minutes—particular predilections for particular projects or forms of expenditure. We also have furious discussions about the distribution of expenditure between central and local government, and even more furious discussions about the major boundary between public expenditure as a whole and private expenditure. We look on it as a residual that should be either increased or reduced.

Inevitably and very properly, with a Budget of this size we concentrate on waste and abuse. We are often well informed by bodies such as the Public Accounts Committee and the Audit Commission about outstanding examples of waste and abuse. We read in the national press this morning of one example; a ship which should have cost £27 million, but ended up costing about £70 million. That was a vast increase in cost and a waste of resources.

These are familiar and well-trodden paths. Anybody who has been a Member of Parliament for some time could easily write the speeches on either side of the argument. What, then, do we not do that is both desirable and practicable? I believe that the limits are very severe. They are the limits of time, comprehension and the sheer volume of data. Within those limits, however, I should like there to be a much more critical analysis of the expenditure boundaries between Departments. These are the great no-go areas of public and political debate—certainly of parliamentary debate.

We should not wait until overclaims—there will never be underclaims—are settled behind closed doors by a so-called Star Chamber committee consisting of Ministers whose experience and dedication to the public interest are supposed by definition to confer on them an objectivity which overrides political, personal, or vested interests. It may in some cases well do so, but it asks an awful lot of any human being. As I have argued in a letter to the former Prime Minister, and subsequently to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, the House should be represented on that committee, and the arguments between the claimants should be known outside the so-called inner circle.

Although the House receives nothing like the analytical and statistical support which is supplied to the United States Congress by the congressional budget office and by the general accounting office—we do not have anything like those large, substantial organisations which serve not the federal Government but Congress—Parliament must ask itself whether it can justify its present impotence when any Government of any party can say to us in effect, "Take it or leave it."

Under our system, as opposed to that in the United States, we have to live with a paradox. I have discussed this before. We have both to sustain the Government in power constitutionally and monitor their claims on and disbursement of the public purse. When that proportion hovers between 40 per cent. and 50 per cent. of gross national product, now well over £200 billion—I think the figure is £270 billion and rising—we should as an institution be much less squeamish about defending an expenditure of, say, £10 million which had the effect of improving national performance by a mere 1 per cent. That would be £5 billion of GNP, or £2 billion of public expenditure. A figure of £10 million, for example, added to the budget of this place would be very badly spent if we could not see an improvement in national performance of that order of magnitude.

As I see it, that will need two things, neither of which will be popular. It will require Governments of all parties to concede that the divergence between constitutional theory and practice is now too great. The House has an obligation and a responsibility which it is not discharging. A great deal more than lip service is required. It requires Parliament to equip itself with a far more powerful and pervasive engine of analysis and inquiry.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South mentioned the inadequacies of these volumes. I think that this is the first time that I have seen a bilingual public document, with 124 pages in Welsh. I wonder how many people will read the Welsh issue. An example of waste is that all the maps and diagrams are duplicated. That is a minor point, but it should not happen. The more major points which the hon. Gentleman made relate to public scrutiny. We require a far-reaching change in what might be described as our political culture.

The second is much more difficult and will go against a much deeper grain. It requires all of us, some of us, or a considerable number of us, to accept that our primary

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

responsibility here is to examine, monitor and, where necessary, modify the performance of Government. Policy must become our preoccupation. We must concentrate on policy—that difficult area of government—rather than on all the minutiae which increasingly dominate the life of the average Back Bencher, rushing back to his constituency to deal with dogs, pavements, drains and quarrelsome neighbours.

It will be argued vigorously that the assiduous Member can do both. Some undoubtedly do; they are very assiduous indeed. That such a Member can, by working 70 hours a week, combine the role of policy maker, performance auditor, local ombudsman and welfare officer, is a suggestion which I find difficult to accept. I will be convinced by that argument when hon. Members, challenged as I challenged them earlier, rise to say that they have read the whole of the public expenditure analysis and papers, and have made active and effective representations to Government on matters which they consider of outstanding significance. That day is quite a long way off.

Mr. John Garrett: I have a great deal of sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says. I believe that we should be better resourced, so that we could examine more closely the spending programmes and policies of Government. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman and I have a problem—that none of the Select Committees has ever ventured beyond the one-off examination of the occasional policies of a Department. None of them has ventured into examining the management of the Departments for which they are responsible. None of them has ventured into examining the expenditure of the Departments for which they are responsible.

Furthermore, we now know from the recent report of the Select Committee on Procedure that none of them thinks that it needs more staff. In other words, most of our colleagues have narrowly defined their role on the matters about which the hon. Gentleman is talking. The hon. Gentleman may tell me how he and I might attempt to change the culture of this place.

If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the load on hon. Members—he listed the constituency matters with which a Member may have to deal—why does he think that so many of his colleagues have outside employment as well?

Sir Ian Lloyd: As to the work of Select Committees, I was not aware of the collective view on resources to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. I thought that there was a general view that they could do with a little more in the way of resources. Certainly that would have been my conclusion at the end of a 15-year stint as Chairman, first, of the Sub-Committee on Science and secondly, of the Select Committee on Energy. They need not a dramatic increase but a significant increase. I thought that our dedicated Clerks were from time to time grotesquely overworked. It was the limit of their capacity, as well as the reading time available to Members, which often determined that we could not extend our scope from the one or one and a half inquiries which we undertook to something which had come up and which should perhaps have demanded our immediate attention.

From my immediate experience in that area, I cannot accept that we never looked at management. We regarded our primary responsibility as an examination of policy. We examined the estimates carefully. There were a number of debates on the Floor of the House in which some aspects of the estimates of the Department of Energy were crucially and critically examined. I would certainly argue that that responsibility of Select Committees should continue. The hon. Gentleman and I share the view that it should be enlarged and reinforced.

I do not think that that is necessarily an argument against what I was driving at earlier, which is that the House as a whole, this great institution of Parliament, should no longer present itself to the country, as we are inclined to do, as, in Bagehot's terms, controlling the public purse. We do not. We elect a Government which may control the public purse in ways which, depending on our political views, may or may not please us, but the House does not do so. I do not believe that that is a necessary condition. It is a condition which has grown, partly because of the reasons that I have given, such as the enormous information overload, and also because of the political culture which I described earlier, which suggests that we should keep ourselves busy in other ways and keep ourselves out of the hair of the Administration. I am not talking in a party political sense; I have seen that across the board.

In regard to underfunding—a concept beloved by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who, I am sorry to see, is not in his seat—we are all familiar with this pervasive and meaningless euphemism. Every one of the 20 documents describes underfunding. The third world is underfunded. Aid to the third world is underfunded. Every charity that I know could easily disburse twice its income. Most companies could invest twice their available capital or make good use of a substantial additional tranche of working capital. The world's richest communities—we must include ourselves, as well as north America, western Europe, Scandinavia and possibly parts of the middle east—cannot meet all the claims on their vast but limited resources.

Needs, as the eminent American economist Kenneth Boulding said, are always defined in such a way as to outstrip supply. If we were to redistribute the entire wealth of all incomes above a national average and capital over, say, £50,000—ignoring the destructive effect of such policy on wealth creation—the funds made available would be swallowed up in a short time by underfunded institutions or communities in a few months at the most.

Inflation generates a wide perception of underfunding, and politics has much to do with perception. Inflation is a process which is designed, and certainly has that effect, to leach value out of currency and ultimately to match demand and supply at the higher price. One of the most pernicious modern practices in the realm of public expenditure—it is especially apparent in local authority budgets—is to forecast an amount for inflation and to include a substantial amount in the budget for it. In biological terms, it is the equivalent of injecting the patient with a live virus.

I should like to see that practice proscribed, although I concede that, at least in the transition period, it would pose immense difficulties. But what a discipline it would impose, even if it gave rise to procedural difficulties. My understanding of such matters may be limited—most of us have a limited understanding of some area of life—but for

a quarter of a century, I have watched the relentless and inexorable way in which the political system has sought to outwit the economic reality and, time after time, has fallen flat on its face. That is why I deplore any attempt by any party, now or at any time, in government or out of government, to put large tranches of public expenditure up for auction, as it were.

We know that an annual rate of inflation of 1 per cent. in the United Kingdom is as clear a sign as we can have that our gross national product of £560 billion will be £5,600 million—1 per cent.—short in real terms of what we have, as a nation, collectively produced. Moreover, it is not a problem that can be solved by taxation, even assuming a zero effect of high taxation on output.

The last time that I looked at the figures, about 4·3 million people earned more than £15,000 a year. Their total income after tax was £79 billion, of which £23 billion had been paid in tax. If that tax figure were doubled to £46 billion—or 58 per cent. of the total—it would hardly cover the annual expenditure of one of the major spending departments. I remind the House of the figures: £60 billion for the Department of Social Security, £22 billion for the Department of Health, £22 billion for the Ministry of Defence, and, lastly, although not on the same scale, £6·7 billion for the Department of Education and Science.

I shall now deal with the science budget. I mention the Department of Education and Science because it is important to relate the total of £6·7 billion, of which just less than £1 billion is for science, to the total figure of £217 billion. Government-funded civil science as a whole, allowing for the research and development undertaken in the other Departments is—I am being generous in taking the upper limit of the Government's figure—not more than £3 billion, although many would argue that the figure is much lower.

Civil science is the most crucial area of national expenditure. First, it influences the structure and much of the content of our wealth-creating system 15 to 20 years ahead. Secondly, there is in my experience no way to compensate for failure in this area in the type of society in which we live—it is increasingly technological and science based. Thirdly, our principal competitors have clearly recognised that fact. I draw the House's attention to the conclusion reached by the Natural Research Council of the United States in a fascinating paper entitled "Science, Technology, and the Future of the U.S.-Japan Relationship". It concludes:

"Each country"—

the United States and Japan, both super-powers in science and technology—

"must tap into the expertise of the other. In the future, neither country will have the resources . . . to support large research projects in all fields."

The paper goes on to state that, from a United States political perspective—I suggest that it is equally valid and true from our political perspective—

"the need to integrate objectives across policy areas is now apparent. It will be necessary to combine scientific, economic, and security goals in pursuit of the national interest."

It continues:

"A top priority for the United States should be to expand the flow of technology from Japan . . . A prerequisite . . . is for the United States to maintain and expand leadership in at least enough fields of science and technology to ensure that both countries will continue to be 'players'—sometimes rivals, sometimes partners, but both on the front line."

That applies 100 per cent. to western Europe, and therefore it applies even more to us as part of western Europe. That is what our competitors think about the subject.

Fourthly, scientists are among the most gifted and important individuals in our society, and, like entrepreneurs, they have a high potential mobility. One pound withdrawn from a leisure centre's budget may stop someone swimming tomorrow or next year; a pound withdrawn from a crucial experiment or from work on microbiology or on ion implantation could mean that in 10 years, a virus such as AIDS gained mastery of the human race or that an industry abroad will set levels of quality and performance which we cannot match because our perspective was too short and we did not do the right things at the right time, which is now.

I do not argue that science in the United Kingdom is underfunded, because that is not a justifying criterion. I have condemned that as a criterion—everything is underfunded. I am arguing that a system that allowed us to shut down a key nuclear research facility for £8 million while we spent £156 million last year on new leisure centres is a system that does not encourage us to make a rational allocation of national resources. To put it another way, it is not only not encouraging us, but actively discouraging us from making such a rational allocation.

The analysis in the statistical supplement of expenditure trends per head is most revealing. The totals are £2,431 per head on public expenditure in the United Kingdom, of which £1,426 a year is spent on health and social security and £421 on education and science. Out of that total, approximately £20 per head is spent within that Department on civil science and approximately £60 per head on all Government-funded research and development. The expenditure total for all Government Departments brings that figure up to £103 per head and, as I understand it, that includes the funding of our universities.

I argue that that figure is relatively and absolutely too low. The thrust of the activity is declining and is seen to be declining by the science community. I know that the science community is a beneficiary and is arguing a case that it believes to be vital to its own interests, but there are times when one must be able to discount the special pleading and say that there is something behind that pleading which is in the national interest. It is the height of folly to ignore or to treat with apparent contempt reports such as that by the Lords Select Committee on the science budget.

I argue that there is no real science budget. The table on page 49 of the general paper is a classic example of what has been described as the fallacy of aggregates. For example, an elephant weighing one tonne plus one mosquito weighing one ounce give an average weight of half a tonne and half an ounce. That is totally meaningless, and I need go no further.

Evidence that the science budget is an orphan within the Department of Education and Science is provided in the analysis of a recent issue of *New Scientist*, which suggests that, in its attempt to meet its 1992-93 cash limit, the Department of Education and Science is arguing that

"the science budget would have to accept larger cuts than the rest of the education budget even though it has already reached the point when it can no longer support existing commitments".

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

It is suggested that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State

"will have to choose between schools or science."

That is a desperate state of affairs.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to deny that report completely on two grounds. First, research and development is not an alternative to education but a fundamental part of its structure and the basis of the education that a society such as ours will require in the 1990s and the next century. Indeed, it is what we require now, and we do not have enough.

Secondly, any nation that allows its science to depend on the financial crumbs from the educational budget table is a nation that has its priorities wrong. Research and development should be the first and not the last claim on a nation's resources at any time—not least in a recession—and I am confident that, if there is unavoidable stringency, somewhere along the vast front of public expenditure—a planned £217 billion—savings of one tenth of 1 per cent. could be found, without pain to fund an additional £217 million on the science budget.

In its admirable analysis of the issue, the House of Lords Committee reached the following conclusion:

"It is incomprehensible to us that a whole area of UK science should have to be precipitately abandoned as part of a series of crisis measures and we roundly condemn the policies and practices which have put so much at risk."

So, most regrettably, do I.

Secondly, the Committee concluded:

"Research Councils are now being required to make choices about scientific endeavour which are too big to be left to Councils—

the research councils—

"alone without political guidance as to what is required of the science base in the context of present spending plans."

The Lords Committee suggests that the Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology, over which I believe my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presides, should involve itself in the public expenditure survey for science, as it was set up specifically to deal with "science matters across Government". I agree.

Let me reinforce my judgment with three graphic illustrations, all of which come from a German Government document, the "Report of the Federal Government on Research 1988". Unfortunately, technology does not permit me to display my illustrations on a screen for all hon. Members to see, but I think that they will be able to understand the thrust of my remark. My first example concerns the table dealing with research and development expenditure and scientific performance level. Britain's performance is indicated by a yellow arrow in the bottom left-hand corner. The red arrow represents Japan's performance. Far up, in the right-hand corner, a green line shows the performance of the United States. Great Britain's performance is shown as starting well but then declining. Japan's performance is shown as overtaking us very rapidly indeed.

My second example comes from the table in the same document on research and development expenditure and technological performance level. Japan's performance is represented by a red arrow and is shown to have climbed to the roof. It is followed by that of Germany. Great Britain is again in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, as is France. My illustrations come from completely unbiased information published by the German Federal Government, whose statisticians have no axe to grind in any sense.

The third chart to which I shall refer shows the shares of Ministers in research and development expenditure of the federal court. We have no Minstry of science and technology but Germany has a federal Ministry for Research and Technology and that Ministry's budget occupies a large area at the bottom of the chart. The federal Ministry of Education and Science, on the other hand, occupies a narrow band. The Ministries of Economics, Defence and so on account for the rest of R and D expenditure.

The sum within the discretionary spending of Dr. Riesenhuber, the Minister, is equal to the total Government-funded civil R and D in the United Kingdom. I know that the place is larger, but my point is that we lack that coherence and cohesion. The documents illustrate a singular point. Nowhere in our documentation have I seen a statement that matches that of Dr. Riesenhuber or graphs from which such a stark and compelling conclusion can be drawn.

The third example is, in my judgment, the most significant, as it reveals the size and scope of the Federal Ministry for Research and Technology, with a budget of DM 7·6 billion by comparison with that for education and science. In 1988, its budget alone—DM 7·6 billion was almost equal to the whole of Britain's Government-funded civil research and development.

There is the key to the Germany's future and to ours and to the survival of western Europe. We will have no excuse if, in 10 years' time, someone consults *Hansard* and says, "We were told this not once but many times and we did nothing. Now it is too late and Britain's scientific pre-eminence—and what tremendous pre-eminence—has over it the sign 'RBC'—ruined by complacency."

Newton's biographer, Sir David Brewster, referred to an "elaborate document" in which Sir Isaac Newton—who, I remind hon. Members, was twice a Member of the House—recommended

"the systematic endorsement of science".

Sir David wrote:

"Were the British Parliament to try this question at its bar, and summon as witnesses the wisest of their race, what name, or what constellation of names could countervail against the High Priest of Science when he proposes to rebuild its temple upon a broader basis and give its arches a wider span and its domes a loftier elevation!"

I wonder what Sir Isaac Newton would have to say today.

6.47 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I do not know whether Sir Isaac Newton would have been called, given that our debate has been going on for well over three hours and we have heard only five speeches so far. No doubt he would have made a compelling point and followed the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) in underlining the need for investment in science. To hear his speech, however, we should perhaps have had to make rather more rapid progress.

The style and character of the debate have changed markedly since we heard some rather bad-tempered exchanges not from the Front Benches but from the Back Benches. I rather enjoyed the Chief Secretary's jokes and I thought that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made a most stirring and effective defence of her proposals on national insurance contributions. She put her

case extremely well. Those who contributed to the somewhat bad-tempered atmosphere of the proceedings have since left for tea, and we may not see them again.

There is an air of unreality about much of the debate. Much of the earlier part of our proceedings was based on the mistaken and disproven belief that Governments can predict with reasonable accuracy what will happen to public expenditure under their stewardship and that potential Governments can predict with reasonable accuracy what resources they will have and what they will do with them. Political parties have to set out plans and work out costings to show that it is at least theoretically possible to do what they propose. But things never work out like that, and Governments have an amazing incapacity to know what will come next and predict at all accurately what effects it will have on public finance.

I could give a number of examples. Take the Government's decision to offer incentives to people to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme. That move was much more powerful in its consequences than the Government had bargained for. I leave aside entirely the question whether it was a good or a bad thing, but national insurance contributions were reduced by almost £2 billion more than expected. That is a pretty big hole to make in any budget.

Similarly, the poll tax affair ended up in local authorities spending and borrowing much more than the Government had forecast in 1989-90—by a figure of around £2 billion. That is already up to a fifth of what the Leader of the Opposition thinks he can safely predict we will get from increased growth and therefore be able to spend in various ways.

Governments get things amazingly wrong. Let me give another example. In 1989, the Red Book forecast a cumulative public sector debt repayment of £19 billion for the ensuing three years. Now the Government forecast a cumulative borrowing requirement of £19 billion for the same three years—in other words, a difference of £38 billion from the amount originally indicated. That is an enormous divergence. I do not blame the Government particularly for it, although I blame them in the sense that the factors are a response to a recession that they should not have caused in the first place. One of the necessary responses is to allow automatic stabilisers to take effect and to engage in more borrowing. But this means a huge divergence—a divergence larger than the amount that the Leader of the Opposition expects will be available for various purposes.

When we turn to the figures about which the Leader of the Opposition talked we have again to make growth assumptions. In some respects, those assumptions are less ambitious than the growth assumptions that the Government make. The Government have forecast that in the latter years of their forecast period—the equivalent of another Parliament—the growth rate will be 3·5 per cent. That is much above the level envisaged even by the Labour party. But actual growth figures rarely correspond to what is forecast.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): There is irony in the exchanges in which people say, "We can provide more growth than you can." For at least the past 40 years—year in, year out—the British economy has grown at 2·5 per cent. per annum. One side tells us that the raw-blooded capitalism of the nation has been released by the Tories; the other side tells us that compassion, decency and fairness have been released by the socialists. It seems that the British people, on the whole, treat both claims with complete indifference and have continued to increase their GNP at a rate of about 2·5 per cent. per annum.

Mr. Beith: There is much in what the hon. Gentleman says. However, he is averaging growth figures over a period. We are now in a recession and do not have that kind of growth. But there is indeed a great deal of well-justified scepticism around.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Let us follow that argument to its logical conclusion. If growth averaging 2·5 per cent. has been a feature of Governments of both complexions over the past 40 years—the compassion from our side following periods of Conservative government—surely the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South West (Mr. Budgen) is saying that it is about time the Labour party came to power and played its part in the cycle.

Mr. Beith: No, it is the turn of the Liberal Democrats. It is time we had a chance to do what we can with the limited growth that the nation is able to achieve. We have certain proposals that we believe would improve the chance of increased growth. However, I shall state the case no more ambitiously than that.

I was analysing some of the assumptions that are made in all these arguments, and I pointed to the Government's growth figures. But let me underline something else: that the Government's own forecasts are nothing like sufficient to achieve the 20p income tax target that the Government have frequently set. No wonder the Chancellor has started to back-pedal. On the basis of the figures that we are debating today, he certainly cannot achieve that target. But it is also rather strange for the official Opposition to say that, if they come to power, the 5p cut will not take place, as they will spend the money in certain ways. But the 5p is not there. It is not available in the projected revenues that the Government have put before us. Even allowing for the inaccuracy of those figures, it is unreasonable to assume that we could confidently arrange to spend the money at some time in the future.

The Government say, "Never mind. We have managed the economy so well that we have achieved massive increases in expenditure on the services about which everybody is most concerned." They have, for example, increased real-terms expenditure on the health service more markedly in the past few years than in earlier years. Indeed, there were cuts in earlier years, but recently—particularly in the last couple of years—the Government have sought to achieve a real-terms increase. But even that figure has to be regarded with some caution. If one examines what is involved, one sees that it does not allow for the higher inflation that the national health service experiences in its costs than is to be found in retail price figures. This is based partly on increases arising from sales and efficiency improvements, some of which cannot be projected continually into the future. One cannot go on selling surplus property; eventually one runs out of property to sell.

The increase does not take account of the growing numbers of people in the age groups in greatest need of health care. In that respect, a per-head figure would be more relevant. Nor does the increase take account of the pressures of new technology on the health service. It is perfectly reasonable for the Government to point out that,

[Mr. Beith]

in the last couple of years, they have achieved real-terms increases, but they might just mention these other points at the same time, for they help to explain why, down in the hospital ward, things do not seem like that at all. In the case of cleaning standards, food standards, the number of nurses on duty and night staffing, many hospitals could tell a tale of stringency and of people working in extremely difficult conditions. The explanation lies in the inability of these increases to match the problems that I have described.

Another unreal feature of the debate on public expenditure is privatisation revenues. If there were to come into office a party that insisted that it would cease all privatisation currently taking place, would introduce no privatisation of its own, and might even renationalise some of the privatised industries, something would have to be done about the £5,500 million for each of the next five years represented by privatisation. In Government accounting, that counts as negative expenditure. In other words, all the money that the Government, in their forecasts, propose to spend has subtracted from it the money expected to come in from privatisation. That has to be taken into account. The official Opposition do not intend to engage in a great deal of privatisation—indeed, quite the contrary—so they cannot simply assume that they have £20 billion to add to what the Government have already spent, unless they subtract a figure for this revenue.

The speed at which we shall get revenue is itself in doubt. It will depend on such things as when the Government decide to sell off the remaining British Telecome shares. The income from that sale will be very substantial, but we do not know when it will come. There are many uncertainties in that area, but what is certain is that the existing public expenditure forecasts must be reduced by the amount of privatisation revenues that one assumes a Labour Government would not seek in any way to obtain.

At a time of recession and unemployment, it is deeply disturbing that, in all these Government figures, the Department of Employment and the Department of Trade and Industry are conspicuous for spending reductions. Surely investment in education and training is necessary if growth is to be produced. Training and education are not particularly inflationary. We do not generate inflation by increasing the training programme. It is a very sensible type of investment in which to engage during a recession and at a time when there are inflation worries. But the Government have cut training expenditure at times when it was most needed. A year or so ago, they even argued that they could afford to cut training investment because unemployment was falling. By the same mistaken logic, they could at least give themselves an excuse to make substantial increases in training expenditure now.

We argue that expenditure on training and education is a precondition for increased growth, for the production of the sort of dividend that other politicians are looking for opportunities to spend. Training is not one of the things that can be paid for after the growth has been achieved. We cannot afford to wait. I maintain that we shall not get the levels of growth that are necessary unless we have a more skilled work force. That is why we argue that, if it should be necessary to add a penny to the rate of income tax in order to provide an adequate training and education programme, we should be prepared to do so. We hope that it will not be necessary, but we are certainly not prepared to say that there would be no increase in taxation in any circumstances—even if the training and education needs could not otherwise be met.

There are other areas of expenditure that will have to depend on the achievements of growth and the buoyancy of revenue. The kind of improvements in social benefits and in the health service that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I—and I assume, the official Opposition—would like to see will depend on achieving a successful economy and sustainable growth. Some expenditure—particularly expenditure on training and education—has to be undertaken in order to achieve growth. The public should not believe any party that claims it will never cut taxes, or which pretends that it can improve underfunded services while reducing taxation. I believe that the public probably realise that.

6.59 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is a long-standing member of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, of which I am the newest member. I am glad also that he devoted much of his speech to Labour's failure to meet the effective challenge made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary in what was not only a colourful and entertaining but an effective speech, in which he exposed the growing contrast that the public perceive between the Government's economic policies and those of the Labour party.

It is very much in my personal vested interest to maintain a good relationship with the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), so I should not want to say anything that might upset her. However, she utterly failed to meet the challenge by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary when he referred to the various confusing statements made not only over the past few days but for weeks by the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Derby, South and a variety of shadow Cabinet members, in making high-priority public commitments in respect of their specific areas of responsibility. I hope that, when the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) replies, he will make an effective answer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary.

Day by day, the Labour is coming out in its true colours, as the party of high spending and high taxation. Its pursuance of those policies when in office in the 1960s and 1970s was one of the main reasons why this country subsequently found itself in such profound economic difficulties. It is important that not only Parliament but the country should draw its own conclusions, and distinguish between party policies.

There is no getting away from the fact that the hon. Member for Derby, South made a commitment that under Labour, there would be an early increase in pensions and child benefit, and that further commitments would play their part later. Other shadow Ministers have also made plain their own priorities. The first priority of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is education; of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), education and training; and of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), dramatic

increases in overseas aid. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has also identified renewed growth in manufacturing investment as a key priority.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) rightly drew attention to Labour's apparent commitment to renationalising the water industry, and to not proceeding with the Government's policy of privatisation if they achieved office in the next five years. Neither was taken into account in Labour's calculations.

Let us compare the Conservative Government's 12 years in office with the Labour Administration of the 1970s. Putting aside the present downturn in the economic cycle, it is clear that, under the present Government, there has been sustained economic growth, and record investment—which is important for the country's future. Over a period of time, there has also been a reduction in direct taxation, and public expenditure has taken a declining share of gross domestic product.

Although my party is sometimes a prisoner of its own rhetoric, there have also been substantial increases in carefully selected areas of public expenditure. In 1979, 1983, and thereafter, we gave the highest priority to turning the economy around, reducing the proportion of expenditure taken up by central Government, encouraging and proceeding with privatisation, and promoting greater competition within the economy. It was perfectly right to do that, but the public's perception is that we have paid no attention to other sectors of the public services. That is simply not true.

As was said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary, health and education expenditure as a proportion of GDP has increased from 4·5 per cent. in 1979 to more than 5 per cent. Expenditure on law and order has doubled in real terms. In the arts—the sector that I once served as a Minister—there has been an increase of more than 50 per cent. in real terms in expenditure on libraries. My right hon. and learned Friend also described the dramatic real increases in spending on roads and the infrastructure. So we are in a sense prisoners of our own rhetoric, and it is important to get the right perspective.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) devoted much of his speech on describing how one can best scrutinise public expenditure and challenge Government targets and performance, and he was right to do so. However, that debate is not one which matters very much. The focus has been too much on the quantity of money put into the public services, and not enough on improving their quality using a given sum of money. Labour says that the answer is to throw more money at the public services, but we should be equally concerned with improving their quality.

The Government's recent reforms and their establishment of executive agencies have resulted in discrete and clear-cut services. Targets are set for them, annual reports have to be made, and their performance can be judged by the House and by its Select Committees. That is a remarkably significant and important reform. I was glad that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said in a recent speech that Labour supports that development. It is important that it should do so. However, Labour spends little time suggesting ways in which the overall quality of public services, such as health or education, could be improved. Rather, Labour says that one should simply throw money at those services to solve their problems—which is quite wrong.

We must not underestimate the importance of the changes that are occurring in the civil service. By next year, 285,000 civil servants will be working within executive agencies in which their work, targets and performance can be properly scrutinised. For those agencies to be effective, they must enjoy the maximum degree of decentralisation and the greatest possible delegation of authority. The Treasury and the parent Departments must allow them to get on with the job and to carry on with their operations as effectively as possible, within the resources agreed. I was concerned by the results of a survey published by Price Waterhouse in March, which indicated that there is a feeling among those working in the agencies that there is still too much interference by Government Departments in their management. I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary replies to the debate, he will assure me that it is Government policy to delegate authority fully and properly within given resources.

Given public demand, there will never be sufficient resources from the taxpayer for public services. There will always be pressure for more resources for health, education and roads. It is the duty of any Government to try to create a climate in which resources can be raised by the private sector and by other means to supplement the support of the taxpayer. In the past 12 years, private sector resources to charitable bodies have doubled in real terms, which is a great achievement. The Government should always be looking for new ways of raising extra resources to enable the public to play a fuller part in helping to pay for services for which, in the foreseeable future, it is less likely that the Government will be able to give much taxpayers' support.

I welcomed the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made in the Budget to increase the overall sum given to the Football Trust for sport and the arts. It is odd that part of the money given to the Football Trust should go to the arts, but I hope that that new venture will succeed. By making available about £60 million a year for sports and the arts, I hope that it will prove to be another way of adding extra resources for sectors that will otherwise receive little support from the taxpayer.

That must not be seen as a subetitute for a national lottery, which I should like to see introduced in the 1990s. In Europe, £12 billion is spent on lotteries. Ireland recently introduced a lottery, which makes available about £500 million for expenditure on the environment, sport and the arts. We should establish an independently run lottery system that allows for capital expenditure on improving sports facilities and on refurbishing theatres for the fabric of the nation, and for endowment funding of sport, the arts and the environment.

We must make it clear that a lottery would not be a subetitute for the Football Trust as it would operate on a larger scale and would raise much larger sums. I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister replies, she will be able to offer some encouragement for the introduction of a national lottery in the near future.

I believe that the Government are on the right course for the management of the economy. We must stick firmly to reducing inflation and to returning to the successful period of sustained growth that we achieved in the 1980s.

7.13 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): When the Tories were fighting the general election, I remember seeing all over the country a big Saatchi and Saatchi poster that said, "Labour isn't working". It showed a queue of people, which represented 1 million unemployed people. Today, more than 2 million are unemployed. What have the Government done to get this country back to work?

Public expenditure is a dirty word to Tories. They have sold off the country's assets, and their privatisation policy has robbed the ordinary men and women who worked hard to make this country rich. The Government seem to go about like pirates, ripping off and selling off businesses that were owned by the country. I always thought that public expenditure was used for the good of the country —to improve the quality of life, to ensure that our elderly people receive decent pensions, that our children received a decent education and that our workers worked in decent, comfortable surroundings while producing the goods that make the country viable.

The Government's obsession with the public sector has driven them to do exceptionally mad things. It does not matter who they hurt in their quest to dismantle the public sector. It does not matter whether elderly people are living in poverty. The Government have no compassion, and I shall give the House some examples of that later.

Privatisation, instead of increasing jobs, invariably led to more job losses, higher prices and to the workers who make a company strong, healthy and attractive to buy being thrown on the scrap heap. People in the City, and the asset strippers, made more and more money.

The price of food and phone charges have rocketed. The price of gas and electricity, which are essential to the quality of life of people on low incomes, has increased. The Government, the engine of free enterprise, should be renamed the "engine of the free giveaway to their friends". They have concentrated on stripping and dismantling industries to ensure their power base, with their people having the money and controlling each of us. The sale of the royal ordnance factories was a classic example of a company that was worth billions of pounds being given away for £140 million. The sale of the Rover Group was a pathetic disgrace. The gas and water industries were given away and the electricity industry is to be hived off to the Tories' friends.

The classic error of the Government is their blatant attack on local government.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Graham: I am not prepared to give way at this stage.

The Government's hatred of local government led to their decimation at the recent local elections.

Mr. Marlow *rose——*

Mr. Graham: Earlier, Tory Members were baying like dogs when my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was trying to speak. I come from a hard school. If the hon. Gentleman continues to try to butt in, I will not give way. I will give way when I am ready.

The Government's underfunding of local government has been one of their most tragic errors. Their underfunding of the national health service has cost them by-election after by-election. The underfunding of local enterprise companies is incredible, as they say that they want to see healthy, trained and educated young people.

What have public expenditure cuts in the national health service meant in Renfrewshire? Waiting lists are growing daily. Thousands upon thousands of people are desperate for not only operations but consultations to find out what is the matter with their health. Recently a friend of mine was suffering from a terrible pain. It took all kinds of meetings before it was discovered that he had a spot on his lung. *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for Northampton, North laughing. It is no laughing matter. If he had any spots on his lungs and it took weeks on end to get an X-ray and an appointment with the consultant, he would not find it a laughing matter.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Graham: No, I wish to continue.

In local government we see that schools are falling down. In my area there are some very good schools, but others desperately need public expenditure. They need more money to make the schools better and a fit place for the children. In some schools rain comes in through the roof and the windows are not watertight or windproof. Local government is striving with its limited money to provide a service.

Crime is raging throughout Britain. Since the Government came to office we have seen a horrific escalation of crime. There has been an escalation in drug taking. The Government peddle the idea that they are prepared to put more money into dealing with drugs, yet they do not provide more task force police to tackle drug abuse in our communities. I shall come back to that because I believe that public expenditure should be directed to problems which cause tremendous anxiety. In my constituency the police take so much time trying to prevent drug taking and catch drug pushers and dealers that other crimes such as burglary, car theft and crimes which feed the drug industry are rocketing. The police need more resources, yet the Government hide behind their hatred for local government and do not direct the resources necessary to allow our police to do an effective job.

I remind the House of the consequences of cutting the number of home helps. The numbers have been cut because of the disastrous poll tax which has forced people to look more closely at budgets. The budget for services such as home helps has been cut. It makes me sick. In Strathclyde, as a result of the expenditure cuts and the lack of money for local councils, we are considering the possibility of cutting fares for the elderly.

We have terrible problems of pollution. The Government should spend enough money to bring the water up to EC drinking standards. Our beaches are the worst in Europe. It is right for the people in the environmental world to call us the dirty old man of Europe. That is not something of which I am proud. It is a terrible day when one cannot walk along the promenade at Blackpool because one is frightened to get a whiff of the pollution, which could cause gastro-enteritis or some other illness. The Government should face up to their responsibilities and ensure that there is enough money to cope with the damage being done to Britain.

Our infrastructure is falling down. If one walks about with one's eyes closed one will bump up against walls

which should have been fixed and replaced. For example, in my constituency there is a quarry with a road alongside which has a wall running beside it. The wall is always being broken down for many reasons. The local authority does not have the money to repair it. But the wall must be repaired so the local authority will repair it. But everything takes time because the Government keep savagely cutting and cutting.

Recently in Scotland we had the launch of the local enterprise companies. My goodness, what a fiasco. The Minister walked about with a big smile and the television cameras came along. The LECs were supposed to regenerate local employment prospects. They were supposed to ensure that local kids would be re-educated and retrained to meet the new Europe of the 1990s. That was what it was all supposed to be about. But it means a 32 per cent. cut in the budget compared with the year before. In factual terms it means that 7,000 young people will not receive training. Adult training schemes will be cut by 17,000 places.

A young man of 18 wrote a letter to me. The letter would bring tears to the eyes of any parent. It should bring tears to the Government. The young man was studying on one of the training programmes to be a plumber. We need plumbers. That young boy was thoroughly enjoying his plumbing training. He was on day release to a college. Incidentally, he was working not for a wage but for the buttons that the Government put up for these kids. Nevertheless, the young man was doing the training because he saw a possibility of becoming a plumber and getting into the big world, possibly down here to the south-east to build houses. Perhaps he could get a job fitting pipes for the moneyed folk who can afford central heating. But that young boy's job was terminated because the Government gave insufficient money to launch the local enterprise company and allow the young people in training to finish their courses.

The training places of thousands of people have been cut. We must not forget the men and women who were training these young people to equip them and give them some chance to earn a living. I live in Scotland, where over 200,000 people are unemployed. The Government have fiddled the figures 28 times to bring the total down to 200,000. But I shall not quarrel with them. I simply remind them that unemployment is a scourge. If it came to their families, they would know what that scourge means. It means that families on low wages cannot afford holidays. I use the word holiday lightly. Many such families cannot afford to eat properly, look after themselves properly or heat their houses in the winter. Yet the children continue to strive to obtain training against all the obstacles that the Government put in their way.

The young man to whom I referred is called Pat Campbell. He lives in Linwood. I shall come back to Linwood later. I have pleaded with Scottish Office Ministers to fund training at the same level as the previous year, with an increase for inflation, to ensure that the kids can finish their training. That would be to show compassion. Surely the Government should use their hearts for that. Surely those young people have a God-given right to finish their training. Surely young Pat Campbell could become a plumber instead of being cut off in the prime of his life. By goodness, he is no academic. He is just someone who makes Britain what it is well worth living for—a working-class young boy. Pat Campbell has been dumped.

I received a letter from an elderly, disabled woman who relies on an electric wheelchair. When I hear the Government saying how well funded the national health service is, it makes me sick. That woman cannot even go to the toilet without the help of her electric wheelchair; indeed, she can go nowhere without it. She wrote to tell me that her wheelchair broke down. It did not automatically stop but took the woman around in circles, which terrified her. However, someone managed to rescue her and take her home. When she contacted the health service to repair her wheelchair, and explained that it was essential for her to get to the toilet, the bedroom and the kitchen, she was given no priority.

When I heard the Minister tonight, I felt that he was like a mugger robbing the old men and women to whom I refer, because that women had to wait five days before someone came from the health service to fix her wheelchair. The job took five minutes. She waited five days for a five-minute job, during which time her whole life was turned topsy-turvy. The health service is facing cuts, expenditure squeezing and all that crap which ensures that the quality of life for my elderly, disabled constituent has been put in jeopardy. No one can state that the health service is not under threat.

This week is the anniversary of an event that hurts me —the closure of the car plant in Linwood. Some folk may not be familiar with that town, but I live up there. The town developed because of the car factory, which employed 9,500 men and women but closed 10 years ago, practically to the week. Where are those 9,500 workers now? Droves upon droves of them have never worked since the factory closed. Many are now dead and buried because they contracted illnesses through the savagery and imposition of unemployment and the fact that they were no longer able to work for a living and provide for their families. Those conditions destroy health, and I had many friends who were affected in that way.

Ten years on, the Government have done nothing to introduce an alternative industry in Renfrewshire. If it were not for the local Labour-controlled council's efforts to attract industry, nothing would have been done. The way in which it goes about it must be punishing to body and soul. It is led by a fine young fireman, Owen Taylor. I do not say that he is a splendid young man simply because he is a Labour councillor. He looks at every opportunity to attract industry and jobs to the area. This week, he said to me, "Tommy, what are we going to do about the anniversary of the plant closure?"

I see that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) is smiling. You should come to my constituency and you will not smile at the tenacity and will power of the people there. The people there will shake hands with you and probably buy you a pint, because I doubt whether you would buy them one. They, at least, have some compassion.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman must speak through the Chair.

Mr. Graham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The closure of the factory and the loss of 9,500 jobs has caused difficulties in the community because we could never replace that many jobs. However, I am impressed by the tenacity of the local people, who hope that some day their young people will have the chance to go down the

[Mr. Graham]

road to work and that the young men will come home with pay and the old men will retire gracefully having earned at least some wages. That would be an honest and realisable dream if the Government were committed to stopping the 2 million unemployment figure from rising continually. But the Government have a mad obsession with reducing inflation. They do not care about people but keep inflation down at the expense of the dole queue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and I have another serious problem at the other end of my constituency in Inverclyde, where one of the finest marine engine building companies in the world is facing takeover. My hon. Friend has been fighting to keep that industry alive not only in Scotland but in this country and to protect the jobs of a fine collection of superb quality engineers, who made Scotland renowned throughout the world. He has challenged the Government to say something sensible about keeping that engine company going because to allow it to be taken over is ludicrou[illegible]

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the campaign in which we are engaged to retain the last marine diesel engine builder of its kind in the United Kingdom. The takeover of that company by Kvaerner Industries of Norway is particularly disgraceful and squalid because of the decision to remove from employment 12 young apprentices. As one who served an apprenticeship in a shipyard, I believe that the last people to be dismissed from a firm when it hits hard times should be the apprentices. Surely the Minister will agree that, with indentured apprenticeships, management has a moral obligation to ensure that such young lads are encouraged and enabled to complete their apprenticeships. The decision in Greenock is a disgrace. I am glad to say that my hon. Friend and I will continue to fight against such squalid managerial decision-making—the first of its kind that I have encountered in the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that telling intervention. It was helpful to express the problems imposed by a Government who are reluctant to save this country's manufacturing capacity.

The Inverclyde area has seen a rapid decline of a once great industry—shipbuilding. The Government seem to forget that we are an island and our marine capacity is being stripped. All kinds of foreign competitors——

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be possible for you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to rescue the House from the hon. Gentleman, who has been boring us for 25 minutes with his personal reminiscences, some of which have little to do with public expenditure?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have been carefully reading the Opposition amendment and it seems that the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) is within the terms of the amendment.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for rescuing me from one of the most boring and tedious Members in the House.

Training is of vital importance. We would hope that our skilled engineers and experts who make the whole country work well—not just in London and the City—could compete with their counterparts in the rest of the world. In order to buy bread for food, we need workers to produce goods. If we shut down manufacturing industry, we shall have nothing to sell. We cannot sell a £1 note—somebody must produce goods to sell to make the £1 note.

Public expenditure in my district sometimes gives me terrible worries. We have seen the rapid decline of all the factories in my region and the introduction of the Government's enterprise zone. I shall not mock the enterprise zone—I wish it success. Unfortunately, it is not a success because there is insufficient money to get it going properly. We have asked the Minister to spend money so that we can get the enterprise zone going and possibly get some work into the district, but our campaign seems to fall on deaf ears. Many local people work voluntarily to try to bring employment into the district, but if they do not receive the necessary finance from the Government, they will not be able to achieve anything.

Lack of public expenditure in Scotland has caused massive housing problems. We have damp housing which is unfit to live in. The council does not have sufficient money to bring council houses up to the proper standard. Homelessness has escalated because there is insufficient money to deal with the problem. We need new homes that people can afford to buy and rent. We need jobs. We need to attack poverty and we need money to buy goods, which are not free. If someone takes shop goods for nothing, he will end up at the police station. Poverty will be eliminated only if the Government spend money, and they must realise that.

I recently finalised a promise that I had made to my 13-year-old son. Some time ago he was in hospital for a while and I promised that I would buy him a bike as soon as he was fit to ride in the fresh air. I took my son over to the bike shop and got a shock to find that bikes cost £200 and more. I thought about a former Minister's nutcase statement—"Get on your bike" in search of a job—and wondered if he realised that a bike costs £200 or even £500. I nearly fell off my bike when I found out. I bought my son's bike with pleasure, but I thought about the many young people from families on low incomes. When I was a young boy, my family was on a low income, but I had a bike and could get about. If young people today are on low wages, what do they do? They can no longer have the pleasure of a bike if it costs £200.

In Scotland, literally thousands of our men and women, and their families, leave our shores in search of work. We hear stories from Australia, New Zealand and America about how well those people are doing. They would love to come home and ask whether there will be any jobs for them if they do and whether we have got rid of this Government yet. We will get rid of them. There are literally thousands of Scots men and women who wish to come home. I wish to see them come home, and I believe that the only way to get them home is to get rid of the Tory Government. I am determined to see Scottish men, women, sons and daughters come home, enjoy our country and live a decent quality of life under a Government who care. I believe that a Labour Government would offer that.

7.46 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): We were given a revealing performance by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the shadow Chief Secretary. She was evasive and declined to take interventions. She was even more obviously evasive in the way that she declined to answer the questions that Conservative Members were able to put to her during her speech. She was markedly indecisive and apparently entirely unable or unwilling either to establish an order of priority in her policies or to set the so-called list of Labour party priorities—which has now become a list of a myriad of objectives—in order of relative importance. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was absolutely right to remind her of Aneurin Bevan's well-known phrase about the language of socialism being the language of priorities. The hon. Member for Derby, South certainly traduced that language and abandoned that Labour party tradition this afternoon.

While on the subject of language, I think that it is more than disingenuous to distinguish between an increase in taxation and an increase in employee national insurance contributions, when one plans to remove the ceiling on employee national insurance contributions, while not removing the ceiling on benefits. The last link between contributions and benefits would be abolished under the Labour party's present plans, and the last vestige of the Beveridge——

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I shall give way when I have completed my sentence, because that may allow the hon. Gentleman to make a more meaningful intervention.

The last vestige of the traditional Beveridge system, the link between contributions and benefits—the concept of national or social insurance—would effectively be destroyed by what the Labour party proposes. We would end up with increases in taxation. Let us call a spade a spade: the Labour party is proposing an increase in income tax—nothing more, nothing less.

Mr. Brown: If the hon. Gentleman is so convinced of the intellectual validity and respectability of his point, why did he not make it to the Government when they removed the ceiling on employers' national insurance contributions?

Mr. Davies: As I always endeavour to do when speaking in the Chamber, I used my words advisedly. I said that the Labour party would remove the last vestiges; I did not imply that the Beveridge system still exists in its original integrity—of course it does not, and some of us may regret that more than others. I do not know that the Labour party has fully taken on board the purport of what was proposed this afternoon by the hon. Member for Derby, South and what has recently been proposed by other Labour party economic spokesmen and women.

It was striking that the hon. Member for Derby, South displayed no clear understanding of the role of public expenditure in economic management. I have always believed that there are three respectable approaches to public expenditure management. One is the doctrine to which hon. Members on both sides of this House were devoted throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries—that public expenditure should be balanced in the same year by public revenues. That is the doctrine of the balanced Budget. It was dear not only to people in this country but to people throughout the western world, including those in the United States until the new deal.

There is no doubt that the disciplines of that doctrine had a positive effect. Under its influence, the western world underwent its initial great industrial transformation. Nevertheless, that was also a period of sharp fluctuations in the economy, and of deep recessions and slumps. There is no question but that the doctrine of the balanced budget contributed materially to those sharp fluctuations and to the depths of the slumps and recessions. In a recession, when incomes fall, naturally Government revenues fall too, as the tax take from the economy falls. If Governments respond to that by reducing their expenditure, demand is further reduced in the economy, and the slump will be deeper.

Over the past 50 or 60 years, the view has been taken that the doctrine of the strict, balanced Budget can be economically damaging when pedantically applied. There was a time, from the 1930s to the 1960s, when a new doctrine, a new orthodoxy, emerged: that it was the responsibility of Government to adopt proactive and counter-cyclical policies. When there was a recession they were to increase their spending deliberately, borrowing so as to be able to do so. When times improved and the economy boomed, and incomes and therefore tax revenues began to rise again, Governments would reduce expenditure and use some of the balance of that revenue to repay the borrowing.

This was the classic Keynesian doctrine of deficit spending. We have learnt that that doctrine was not very effective in achieving its objectives, either. It, too has been shown to be essentially not a counter-cyclical or anti-cyclical policy but a pro-cyclical policy. Instead of increasing stability, it tends to increase the volatility of an economy. Instead of reducing the depth of recessions and the extent of inflationary booms, this doctrine tends to exacerbate them.

The reason for that is simple. Unfortunately, it is not possible for any man or woman consistently to second-guess the economy, any more than it is possible for anyone consistently to second-guess the individual markets that make up an economy, or for any mortal consistently and correctly to predict the weather.

As a result, by the time a Government have decided that recessionary conditions have arisen and it is appropriate to start deficit spending, the turn in the economy may well already have taken place, so that, when the spending comes through, instead of mitigating the recession it makes the boom more inflationary. That is especially true of investment spending, because of the long lead time between the decision to engage in it, the identification of the right objects of the expenditure, and the increase in demand which it brings about.

There are at least two other problems with Keynesian deficit spending, as our experience since the second world war has shown. First, it is in the nature of Governments —I fear that perhaps it is in human nature—that the increase in spending in a recession will always be much greater than the reduction in spending in a boom. The net effect of such intervention is therefore inflationary. We have, of course, suffered considerably from that over the past 20 or 30 years. The second factor is that, if it is known that Governments intervene deliberately and proactively in that way, agents in the economy will anticipate such

[Mr. Davies]

action and discount it. The theory of rational expectations has taught us a lot about that, so we have become wiser in that respect, too.

I believe that the right policy is the third policy, which has been explicitly adopted by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is not to adopt a proactive, counter-cyclical, or a proactive, pro-cyclical policy on public expenditure, but to adopt a policy that is neutral with regard to the business cycle. Such a policy looks through the business cycle and allows the operation of what are known as automatic stabilisers. For example, in a recession, because welfare spending tends to increase Government spending all other things being equal, thiswill naturally tend to rise, whereas revenues will tend to fall. Hence, a deficit is likely to arise.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us where all this theoretical philosophy comes in, and what it does, for people in Scotland and the rest of Britain? Does he realise that 10 million people are living in poverty now, 2·5 million of them children? What are we to tell people who lose their homes, whose homes are repossessed—there are now 24,000 of them in Scotland and England? What are we to tell the 25,000 small business people who lose their businesses? When the Government took power in 1979, there were 344 small business insolvencies in Scotland. The latest available figure, for 1990, is 4,756. No doubt the figure for 1991 will break all records. How are we to explain to all those people, and to the 70,000 people on waiting lists——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an intervention, not a speech. The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) must be allowed to make his speech in his own way.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has asked me a series of questions, but they all have the same answer, so it is easy to deal with his intervention. There is not and never will be a final solution that will obliterate all human poverty and disappointment, but there is a great difference between sound and unsound economic management. Unsound economic management will engender far more human unhappiness than sound economic management. If the hon. Gentleman neglects some of the principles of sound economic management—I fear that, if the Labour party in its present state of mind ever came to power, that is what it would do—the problems to which he has drawn attention would be exacerbated.

The Government have been on the right lines in adopting what I call a neutral policy and allowing the operation of the automatic stabilisers which inevitably mean that we tend to move into fiscal deficit in a recession and to run a surplus in a boom. That has happened over the past few years.

I have set out three intellectually and historically respectable approaches to the management of current expenditure. But there is a fourth approach—spend, spend, spend, regardless of the state of the trade cycle and of the effect on the economy. This approach involves going on spending until one runs up against the final obstacle and exhausts either the ability to tax or the ability to borrow. That policy has been practised in many parts of the world—notably in Latin America, generally with disastrous consequences, to which I should like to draw the attention of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). Countries that were prosperous before the war, such as Peru, Uruguay and Argentina, have been ruined by this policy.

In this country, there is a well-founded suspicion about the Labour party. When it was in power in the 1970s, it too adopted the policy, and went on spending until it ran out of borrowing power. That is why the International Monetary Fund had to come here in 1976, like a team of official receivers entering a bankrupt company. That is exactly what it was. There is considerable and justified disquiet about the Labour party, and it existed before the great confusion engendered by its statements in the past two weeks.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): The hon. Gentleman used the phrase "spend, spend, spend". The Chief Secretary said that the Government have greatly increased public expenditure. Does that show that Government policy is to spend, spend, spend? The hon. Gentleman spoke about good and bad economic administration. Would he say that the Japanese and German economies are badly run? Those countries each have a good balance of payments, while ours is excessive and rising.

Mr. Davies: Japan has a healthy fiscal surplus, and to that extent we have the same fiscal stance as the Japanese. The German economy is coming out of surplus because its fiscal and balance of payments surpluses are disappearing. However, that is a separate matter and it is not germane to my argument.

It is plain that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) does not subscribe to any of the first three classic approaches to public expenditure management that I have outlined. Twice, she specifically protested that the Government had run a surplus during the boom years of 1988 and 1989. Running a surplus would have been a natural consequence of the Keynesian approach or the neutral approach of which I spoke. Is the hon. Lady's approach the fourth approach—it is certainly not a balanced Budget—or is it a new model, a new solution, to the problems that have fascinated those who are responsible for public finance for at least 150 years?

In the past week, I have begun to suspect that Labour has invented a new fifth model, which I shall call the theory of random numbers. An Opposition Member thinks of a number during a television interview, and one of his colleagues thinks of another number the next day in the House. A third colleague will then try to clear up the mess by coming up with another number in a television interview a day or two later. That is Labour's contribution to the vital matter of public expenditure policy. The figure of £20 billion has simply been thrown out, and the hon. Member for Derby, South signally failed to justify it or to relate the figure in any way to Britain's capacity to finance it.

The British people will not hand over Britain's economic management to a party which obviously cannot decide between competing objectives and cannot establish clear priorities, which cannot weigh up the consequences of its proposed actions and will not state simply and clearly its concept of public expenditure within economic management. Labour no longer knows what it is saying or doing.

8.3 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The speech by the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) was in two parts. The first part was a serious academic analysis and I tried hard to follow his argument. The second part degenerated into political knockabout. That was because, in the last period of this Government, he seeks to get himself elevated.

The hon. Gentleman castigated the Labour party as some sort of replica banana republic, using phrases such as "spend, spend, spend". He should look at the serious work being carried on in the Labour party. I could take the criticisms more seriously if his party, which has had well over a decade in Government, had bequeathed to society an efficient economy flowing with goods and respected abroad. It would help if unemployment were diminishing, and we had healthy public services and a healthy private sector. The fantasy propounded by Conservatives does not in any way accord with the facts of our economy and industry.

One would hardly think from what we have heard that growth has been unspectacular and that we have had two, perhaps three, recessions. In my constituency, unemployment is double the rate that it was when the Government came to office in 1979. I represent a constituency in the midlands which has historically been in the forefront of manufacturing. Britain has lost 2 million manufacturing jobs, and many of those were in the industrial west midlands. In view of the way that the economy has plummeted, lectures by Conservative Members are most unfair.

Parliamentarians deal in a disgraceful way with issues such as this. We read in the text books about parliamentary control of this and that, but we have abysmally abdicated our responsibilities for controlling public expenditure. Despite reform of the Select Committee system, the National Audit Office and parliamentary procedures, in terms of controlling the Executive, this is probably the weakest legislature in the democratic world.

There is growing legislative power in eastern Europe, and the countries there are well ahead of us in controlling their Executives. I have been to conferences on parliamentary control and it is with acute embarrassment that I tell parliamentarians from other countries how supine we are in dealing with the Executive and how seldom we vote on serious issues like this. This matter is of all-party interest and we ought to get to grips with control of expenditure. I am a member of the Select Committee on Defence, which is one of the better Select Committees, but the way in which we seek to deal with defence expenditure is lamentable.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is my hon. Friend worried that the increasing amount of legislation in the last few years has given great powers to Secretaries of State to take action without reference to the House? That increases the tendency of which my hon. Friend speaks.

Mr. George: I entirely agree. I have criticised the Government, but much of my criticism could be levelled at hon. Members. If we got together on an all-party basis and took a more serious interest in the minutiae of estimates and expenditure, we would be able to do a much better job. Select Committee dealing with expenditure are no more than amiable seminars.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend speaks about the weakness of Parliament. Does he agree that the continuing weakness of this place is made worse by the growing power of political decision makers in Brussels and Strasbourg?

Mr. George: I partly agree with my hon. Friend. Even if we were able to extricate ourselves from Europe we would not be able to control our Executive in the sphere of public expenditure. I welcome the way in which the expenditure plans are now being published—it is a great step forward—but that in no way increases our control.

Public expenditure reflects differences in political philosophy. I was in Parliament during the 1970s. It was not an idyllic period to hold office. The Labour Government had no majority and we were in the middle of the oil shocks. It was exceedingly difficult to manage the economy in those difficult years, but lessons have been learnt. Any Government who offered limitless expenditure to improve services left, right and centre in a pre-election period would rightly be diminished in the eyes of the electorate. Any party aspiring to office must act in a responsible manner in opposition if it is to be taken seriously. Despite the criticisms that I have heard from Conservative Members, the Opposition are being realistic and are not seeking to enter into an auction with the Government. We are seeking realistically to present to the electorate the way in which we shall seek to manage the economy in the future.

The effect of Government policies in my constituency is unemployment at 10 per cent. and rising. Unemployment in the west midlands rose last month by 12,000 to 7·7 per cent. I regret that we may be returning to the situation that existed in the early 1980s, when, almost every time the telephone rang in the hon. Member's office, it was feared that it would be a personnel manager or a trade union representative telephoning to say that there were to be major redundancies or a factory closure. There has been a vast increase in the number of bankruptcies. I want to see the small business sector survive, but the small entrepreneur, allegedly well represented by Conservative Members, is going through a difficult period and suffering greatly.

Training is surely the key to our future economy. A few weeks ago, I visited an excellent training scheme run by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders which was being closed by the local training and enterprise council because money was tight. The scheme was worth preserving and I spoke to management and trainees who were very upset that it was about to bite the dust. Thankfully, the people who were losing their places in that scheme were to be absorbed elsewhere.

From the press today, I see that the Government are considering stepping up the number of jobs deliberately created in order to mop up more of the unemployed in this pre-election period. The Government have closed schemes, in some places irrevocably, but perhaps in the next few months new schemes will emerge as the Government, in their electoral panic, seek to create jobs.

I want to dwell on one area which shows the difference in philosophy between the Government and the Opposition, and that is the sphere of police manpower and expenditure. A report by the National Audit Office on promoting value for money in provincial police forces says:

"Spending on the police has risen by nearly 30 per cent. in real terms from 1979-80 to the present."

[Mr. George]

I welcome that. I welcome the fact that over a 10-year period there has been an increase of some 10 per cent. in the number of police officers. According to my rather limited mathematics, that means an increase of 1 per cent. each year. But in terms of output, the situation is serious. I do not want to involve the hon. member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) in my political speech, but we went on an all-party delegation to the Home office a year ago seeking additional police officers. I remember the occasion vividly, but for the wrong reasons.

If one looks not at expenditure but at output in my area and that represented by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, one sees that crime increased by 23 per cent. last year. Even though there has been a significant increase in expenditure, it has not, in H division of the west midlands, Walsall, been reflected in any significant increase in manpower. The way in which the police have been compelled to cope with a vast increase in crime has been grossly inadequate. I want to see more public expenditure, but it must be public expenditure properly applied. An increase in public expenditure unrelated to intelligent and sensitive decision-making is anathema to me.

I fear that the Government's hostility to the public services is partly reflected in the way in which they deal with the police. The Government have not sought to privatise the police force directly, but they are doing so indirectly by allowing the private security industry to burgeon and to assume more and more responsibilities that should be the exclusive responsibility of the official police force. Now we have two police forces, one accountable to Parliament and to Ministers and the other accountable to no one except shareholders, should they exist. The consequence is a private police force that is more numerous than the official police force, but where efficiency is low, criminality is high and accountability is zero. I fear that that is the way in which the Government approach the question of public order. More money has been spent, but, bearing in mind the enormous increase in the work load, the Government have gone about things the wrong way.

Like many hon. Members, I received a circular letter from my opponent, no doubt a wheeze of Tory central office, attacking Labour Members on education. The Government will reap the rewards of their education policy. I will not dwell on the national health service because the Government will hear quite enough about that in the obituaries after the Monmouth by-election.

I looked carefully at the departmental report of the Ministry of Defence in the Government's expenditure plans. Its figures belong to "Alice in Wonderland". The Government's problems in defence matters are enormous, far worse than the problems in other Departments, for a number of reasons. First, defence expenditure is falling and the Government do not know how to reconcile the demands for a peace dividend—and the enormous pressure upon them from the Treasury—with an uncertain international situation where there are so many imponderables such as in the middle east, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, where we do not know how they will develop.

Civil servants in the Ministry of Defence are being compelled to make cuts that prudence dictates they should treat more cautiously than the Treasury is allowing them to do. Decisions that might be irrevocable should not be taken at this moment. We can plan for what may well be a substantial decrease in defence expenditure, but at the moment it would be wise not to make any precipitate decisions.

The Ministry of Defence has tried to go down the route of greater competition, contractorising, reorganising and setting up management surveys, but the end product has not been sufficient to match commitments and resources. Thank God that we were successful in the Gulf and that casualties were so low, but I fear that the corollary to the Government not wanting to appear to be cutting defence expenditure in the 1980s was that our forces were extended beyond the limits of their capability. Had the 100-hour war in the Gulf been more serious, I fear that some of the consequences of that policy would have been dramatically and disastrously exposed.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Defence which visited Kuwait a month ago just after the conflict ended. We all know that, in order to run 150 Challenger tanks—not the finest tanks—effectively in the desert during that war meant using virtually every single tank that we had in west Germany for spare parts.

Our guys and women in the Army, Air Force and Navy did magnificently, but they were let down, although thankfully that fact was not exposed. There has been a policy of cutting back on infrastructure and logistics and of not replacing worn-out equipment and cancelling projects. Fortunately, we were not exposed because of the failures of that policy and I rejoice in that. The Government face a dilemma; if they are to cut expenditure we will have to cut commitments. It is a great dilemma —trying to maintain commitments and to maintain the fiction that nothing has changed, while defence expenditure has fallen under this Government from a percentage of GNP in the mid-fives, to a percentage in the mid-fours.

The pre-election period may be short, but it is more likely to be lengthy, and it is a period in which political parties will have to explain their philosophies and policies —I hope that they will do so realistically. The electorate is sophisticated and any political party that seeks to convince the electorate that it is able to resolve all our problems instantaneously will be quite rightly rejected.

In the past couple of years, the Labour party has done a great deal of work to present its policies and elaborate upon them—far more work than is often done when in opposition. When we eventually face the electorate, we will have prioritised. It will not be a case of one person announcing his or her priorities and the Government getting their civil servants to work out how much it will cost. We shall have to prioritise. The failures of the Government and the economy will not be remedied overnight and any political party that seeks to pretend that that is so will be very foolish. I am delighted that the Labour party is not likely to fall into that category.

8.21 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I should like to take up the last argument of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who said that he believes that our activities in the next few months will

increasingly be devoted to explaining the differences between the philosophies of the various parties in the House. I shall confine my remarks to two matters: first, to offer a few reflections on growth and the extent to which it can be created by Governments; and, secondly to say a few words on interest rates and the dispute which is arising between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor.

May I start on my first point by complimenting the Chair upon the way in which those who have contributed to this debate have been called? We have had a wide-ranging debate, illustrating the inexorable pressures on public expenditure. There was a dramatic peroration to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd). As I listened to him, I reflected on the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) sits for the seat which was once represented by the Whig playwright, Sheridan.

On one occasion, Sheridan got over-excited in the House—he drew a dagger and began to direct it towards his heart. Fortunately, the House was not overawed by that somewhat histrionic gesture. The equivalent of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) was sitting on the opposite Tory Benches. As Sheridan's knife fell to the ground in the dramatic last moments of the scene, the Tory opposite said to him, "Hey, you've dropped your penknife." Some of the force of the drama diminished in the face of those laconic remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant demonstrated that even Tories can from time to time add to the pressure for public expenditure. However, I thought that the pressures upon public expenditure were demonstrated most dramatically by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) and in the intervention from his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). Each and every member for the Opposition has demonstrated their desire for massive increases in public expenditure in this debate. I am sure that in the course of the next few months it will become plain that the grass roots of the Labour party want more and more public expenditure. They are perfectly entitled to demand that. However, it will not do for the leaders of the Labour party to say that all that expenditure will, in substance, be paid for out of growth.

The Tory party asks, quite reasonably, how will it be paid for? Is it going to be paid for by increased taxation? Are the Opposition going to borrow more, and will that lead to higher interest rates? Or will they print money? "No," says the Labour party, "in substance, we will deal with it by growth."

Growth has been the great cop-out of post-war politics. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will remember the Wilson and George Brown dash for growth, which was brought to a dramatic halt by Mr. Roy Jenkins, one of the best and most iron of Chancellors. You will also recollect Lord Barber's dash for growth between 1972 and 1974. To some extent, that was checked by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) in 1976. However, it would be too much to hope for that British politics should have learnt from those few mistakes.

You will also recollect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the next dash for growth was in 1978, when the predecessors of G7—I think that they called themselves G5—made a worldwide co-ordinated dash for growth with a universal reduction in interest rates. That had a major effect, in that it had to be corrected in the massive depression between 1979 and 1982. That was not good enough, because by 1985 the Tories had forgotten their mistakes and from 1986 to 1988 there was another dash for growth, although it was never so described.

While there was the appearance of very much higher growth of between 4 and 5 per cent., my right hon. Friend the then Chancellor used to keep on saying that he had cracked it, and that there was an economic miracle—low inflation at about 3 per cent. and high rates of growth at 5 per cent. He never mentioned that he was allowing the money supply to increase by more than 20 per cent. per annum. Those high levels of growth were merely the early signs that he had over-expanded the economy by an excessive increase in the money supply.

Governments may come and Governments may go, but those of us who received part of our political education from, for example, Lord Joseph, remember how compellingy he argued that it was the duty of Government to hold the ring and, most of all, to ensure that money was sound, but it was neither their duty nor was it given to Government to create growth, that that is created by individuals, who may create growth from time to time in the most unpropitious circumstances.

Ironically, when circumstances become more propitious—for instance, after a major increase in labour productivity because of our trade union reforms, or more efficient capital because of the abolition of exchange controls—they may decide that they do not want necessarily to go on making more money. They may come to the conclusion that they have made enough.

The evidence is clear that, year in, year out, the British economy will provide no more than 25 per cent. of real growth. If the Labour party intends to claim at the hustings that it can increase public expenditure out of growth, a 2·5 per cent. real increase in public expenditure will not be enough. When its leaders go up to Scotland, they will find the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde at the back of the hall, asking, "What are you going to do about my hospital? What are you going to do about my industry? What are you going to do about this, and what are you going to do about that?" That will become the cry.

Will this 2·5 per cent. per annum be enough for all that? It will not bring in the new Jerusalem, or make it possible to transform Britain into a fairer or more equal and prosperous place. If the Labour party wants to increase public expenditure, which it is perfectly entitled to do, it must campaign on the basis that it will be done either by higher taxes or else by higher borrowing, since 2·5 per cent. growth per annum will not do the trick.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. He has a cult following on our side of the House, and I freely confess to being a member of it. I enjoy his contributions to our debates. I was with him right up to his last point. The Labour party does not intend to make a dash for growth. We intend to make slow, steady and orderly progress and to use the fruits of that progress for public expenditure. Our tax policies have already been clearly and carefully set out. There is no hidden or further agenda, as the hon. Gentleman tries to imply.

Mr. Budgen: I hope that I have dealt with that point. I fear that, under the pressure of the demands from, in

[Mr. Budgen]

particular, a very large caucus in Scotland, promises will be made that more can be delivered than a growth of 2·5 per cent. per annum can supply. If such a promise is made, that is the way to disaster.

May I say a few words about what the popular papers describe as a dispute between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer about reducing interest rates? I am one of those who would wish greater independence to be exercised by the Governor of the Bank of England, but not because I want this country to go into any form of Euro-bank.

I want this country to return to a freely floating exchange rate. When we return to it, I can see that there will be a question as to where the discipline in our economy resides. I believe that a more independent bank will be the answer to that problem. We read tonight about the Governor's speech yesterday. It seems to me, having obtained a copy of the speech, that it has been somewhat hyped up by the press. None the less, the Governor suggests that he is sceptical about further reductions in interest rates.

I think that on this issue the balance of argument is in favour of the Government further reducing interest rates as quickly as possible. The Government have got themselves into a most appalling jam by having joined the exchange rate mechanism. We are at the whim of foreign speculators in currencies. We are forced to have as the principal determinant of the level of our interest rates the position that our currency has in the exchange rate mechanism. We have also advanced fallacious arguments about the circumstances in which we can reduce interest rates.

The Chancellor keeps saying, "We'll be able to reduce interest rates when the retail price index comes down," but that has nothing whatever to do with current economic conditions. If the RPI is falling—I believe that it will fall substantially in the near future—that has nothing to do with current economic conditions: it is a reflection of the squeeze that was imposed some 18 months ago.

Therefore, in deciding what should be the current level of interest rates, we ought to look at the most up-to-date statistics. We ought to see what is the state of credit in the economy now, not what the state of credit in the economy was 18 months ago. I believe that the three most important indicators point to the necessity of a further reduction in interest rates.

The first is broad money. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will recollect that that used to be the complete bible for the Conservative Government. Between 1979 and 1982, it used to be the standard to which every economic decision was referred. We have torn up that bible, but I have retained a copy for my own use.

It is plain that broad money, which was once increasing by 21 per cent., is now increasing only by just over 7 per cent. That suggests a considerable credit crunch. Secondly, the Government's narrow money indicator is M0. They believe that narrow money ought to be increasing by between 0 per cent. and 4 per cent. per annum. It is now increasing by over 2 per cent. per annum. When one recollects that at the height of the boom in 1988 narrow money was increasing by 8 per cent., one can see the extent to which there has been a real reduction in credit.

My third point relies on the most recent figures for bank lending. At the height of the boom, bank lending was increasing by between £5 billion and £6 billion per month. It was a massive boost to house prices and asset prices. In the last recorded month, bank lending increased by only £700 million—a massive reduction. Those three factors —together, I agree, with anecdotal evidence—show that there is a credit crunch.

The Government are entitled to say, "We want to reduce inflation." Theoretically, it is possible to reduce inflation so fast and so fiercely that money appreciates in value against other assets, but if people are to adjust to a reduction in inflation, what is surely required is to allow it to be done gradually, as was envisaged in 1979 by the medium-term financial strategy.

There is every evidence that the Government, simply because of having been caught in the ridiculous ERM, are, if anything, reducing credit too fast. Therefore, the balance of argument is in favour of a further reduction in interest rates at this time. That does not mean, of course, that we will not have to have an increase in interest rates later perhaps. All I am saying is that the best and most up-to-date evidence of what is happening at present and not what happened 18 months ago shows that there is a credit crunch which should be relieved by further reductions in interest rates.

8.40 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I was spurred to take part in the debate by the opening speeches. The Chief Secretary seemed to indicate that the Government have run out of steam and are fast running out of time. As the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) progressed, there was a determined attempt by Conservative Members to disrupt it and to distort the proposals of the Labour party on growth, taxation and spending.

I want to comment on a few of the many issues covered in the debate. When he is replying, I want the Financial Secretary to tell us what will happen to the funding of local government expenditure next year and how poll tax bills will be kept down. He will say that the Chancellor indicated in his Budget that the percentage of local government funding to be met nationally was being changed, but one has to recognise that there will be massive increases in local government expenditure, arising from community care and other things to be introduced next year, as well as inflation and other factors. It is already clear that, if poll tax bills are to be kept anywhere near this year's level, we are talking of substantial additional government funding.

When the Government introduced the poll tax, they claimed that it was to help the pensioner living alone, as opposed to the family next door where, there might be three or four wage earners. The Government now have to answer why, in constituencies like mine, the single pensioner will be paying double the amount paid under the rates whereas, because of low rateable values, three or four people living next door will pay much less. Hundreds of my constituents are very angry about what the Government have done.

Growth is important in relation to what a Labour Government would do. The Government's motion talks of reducing expenditure in relation to the gross national product. We want to see public expenditure and value for

money, but we recognise that growth will play an important part in our plans. We have grave regrets because the Government have failed to recognise the importance to the nation of manufacturing industries that have suffered so considerably in recent years. In the latest recession, there are severe attacks on the service sector, but again the recession is affecting manufacturing industries very badly.

Lancashire is very dependent on manufacturing jobs, with aerospace providing major employment. British Aerospace at Preston has announced 3,000 redundancies. The same group has also announced some 400 redundancies at the royal ordnance factory at Blackburn. Yet that company has probably benefited more than almost any other from the policies of the Government. It has benefited from three privatisations—its own, the privatisation of the Rover Group and the privatisation of the royal ordnance factories which are under the British Aerospace umbrella. It has had assistance with launch aid for the airbus and it is heavily dependent on Government contracts for defence. Yet, while it is announcing massive redundancies, large parts of its work are being contracted overseas.

When I raised the matter with the Minister for Industry he said that it is not a matter for him but that it is up to market forces and is purely a matter for the company; he said that he did not intend to intervene. In another letter on another issue, he told me that aerospace was not an industry of great national importance. If the Government regard aerospace, which is high-technology, modern industry as of little national importance, that shows why we have suffered so much industrial decline under the 12 years of Conservative Government since 1979. The Government must take a much more positive approach to industry in their final period in office. Certainly it is something that our policy will recognise.

In our amendment we recognise the importance of training and investment in people. When one talks of training, one has to link with it the importance to the nation of education. Investment in people through education and training is the biggest single investment that the country can make. One sad fact is that our record in education and training is abysmal and appalling compared with the performance of other countries with which we are competing. It is no wonder that we are doing so badly.

In regard to the national health service, hospitals in my constituency are in the process of trying to opt out. There will be strong resistance. When the matter was before the council, a unanimous resolution by all parties, including the Conservatives, condemned the opt-out proposals for the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Gentleman should be more accurate. There is no question of any hospital opting out of the national health service. Hospitals may become hospital trusts. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that the mess that the London hospitals have got into is on their own heads? Hospitals in the north-west, particularly those in Lancaster, are extremely well run. Although we may apply for trust status, we have no intention of laying off staff. Will not the hon. Gentleman join me in saying that it is high time London put its house in order and that we in the north-west got the money that London has had too much of in the past?

Mr. Pike: The hon. Lady fails to recognise the funding shortages that exist in the north-west region. I made a sad mistake in giving way to her. When I agree with something that the hon. Lady says, that day will go down in history. I went to Lancaster community health council earlier this year because the hon. Lady and the other Conservative Members from that area refused to go.

I wanted to make a point about Christie hospital, which has opted out—I will use that phrase although Conservative Members object. Christie hospital, the major cancer hospital in the north-west and a hospital of international reputation, has made it clear that it will give priority for treatment to patients living in district health authority areas that can give the hospital financial support. If an authority can pay towards the opening of another ward, the hospital will give the people of that area preferential treatment. That is appalling.

My health authority, which has had to consider the closure of the third hospital in Burnley within three years, cannot afford to give money to Christie for another ward. That is appalling discrimination. It means that patients will not be treated on the basis of need, a point that the Prime Minister was trying to make and that was hotly disputed only last week, but will be treated only on the basis of the area in which they live and whether that health authority can assist the hospital.

I shall deal with two other issues, the first of which is rural housing. The documents state that there will be additional provision for housing associations in rural areas, but they fail to recognise the major need for affordable housing which local authorities in rural areas must be able to tackle. Housing in rural areas is a great problem and the Government must give more assistance to tackle it.

Secondly, I shall deal with overseas aid. I do so because Conservative Members have attacked that issue several times in this debate. We have talked about the 0·7 per cent. of gross national product which is the target figure at which we should aim. During the Government's period in office, the figure has dropped from above 0·5 per cent. by about 0·2 per cent. to just more than 0·35 per cent. That is an appalling record. If they do nothing else, the current problems in Bangladesh and the problems with the Kurdish people should bring home to us that we have a responsibility to tackle problems not only in this country, but elsewhere in the world where there is poverty, starvation and other problems that could be solved if nations such as ours did a little more to tackle them. It is right for us to strive towards the 0·7 per cent. target. We should not wash our hands of these problems and a Labour Government would try to solve them as rapidly as possible.

8.51 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made a speech in classic style, the excellent first half of which I endorse. I am saddened that he continued to speak when I thought that he had sat down. Once again he seemed not to have read my contributions to the debates about the benefits of joining the exchange rate mechanism, but I shall ensure that he gets copies of *Hansard* containing the relevant sections. My hon. Friend will then understand that many of his worries about monetary policy and the lack of discipline would have been solved if we had joined the ERM in 1985.

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

The first part of my hon. Friend's speech was extremely good and pertinent and I am sad that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was not present to hear it. However, I am delighted that the hon. Member who will reply for the Opposition—the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown)—enjoyed it and took note.

We are not saying that there will not be extra revenues from growth—of course there will. The hon. Member for Derby, South was wrong to accuse us of saying otherwise. However, we are saying that that level of growth will be insufficient to meet the expenditure plans—all of them priorities—that the Labour party has already announced. The revenues from growth alone will be insufficient, no matter what the level of growth. There will always be more top priorities for the Labour party.

The question is, to which priorities will the Labour party be truly attached, or, if to them all, by how much will taxes increase under a Labour Government? That is a reasonable request to put to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and we should be told what will happen.

The reality is—the electorate should listen carefully, and Labour Front-Bench spokesmen might also benefit from listening—that if the Labour party is incapable of generating from growth the money required for its priority plans, it will have to play on the fiscal level. Regardless of the uncertain buoyancy of tax revenues and the other issues about which I could argue if I had the time, the public should be aware that the Labour party will be forced to increase taxes.

It might have been possible for Labour to say that it would merely remove the upper limit on national insurance, but it has already said that and it has already precommitted the revenues from that to two of its top, top priorities. The other issues that are part of the national debate can be funded only by an increase in the basic rate of taxation. The Labour party should forget the top rate of taxation—that yield will not solve its problems. But let the top rate taxpayer be warned that top rates will increase. The hon. Member for Derby, South made that clear today. That is a warning, but basic rate taxpayers should take particular notice because they will be the ones chiefly to be hit, and they will be hit twice: by the national insurance upper limit being removed and by the increase in the basic rate. There are 2·1 million basic rate taxpayers, but 3·8 million people will be affected by the increase in the national insurance limit. Therefore, a significant proportion of the population should be careful about the prospect of the return of a Labour Government.

The hon. Member for Derby, South did not seem too concerned. She concentrated on the average of various categories of people such as teachers. They may be the average, but that implies that a considerable number of people earning above the average in professions that we regard highly will be hit—doctors, teachers and many others whom the Labour party like to think are high on its list of priorities, but who are certainly high in our esteem. Under Labour's new tax plans, those people will lose at least several hundred pounds more than they would have paid under the community charge. I hope that they will take careful note of that fact.

Another reason why taxes will have to rise under Labour is that Labour will voluntarily forgo the proceeds of privatisation which, under Government plans, are expected to bring in about £5·5 billion in each of the next three years. The Labour leader thought that the growth rate under a Labour Government would generate £20 billion over five years, but he is prepared to forgo three times £5·5 billion.

Labour's sums start not to add up if they are considered carefully, but there is worse—specific pledges within the lifetime of a Labour Government to renationalise. The cost of renationalising the national grid, for example, is difficult to estimate, but it could be half a billion pounds or much more. There are many other estimates of what Labour Back-Benchers—although Labour Front—Bench spokesmen are rather coy about it—would like to renationalise and those costs would soak up the growth balance. On top of that, there are spending pledges or social commitments which will pre-empt any growth. The minimum wage would be introduced up front before growth had any impact on the generation of further revenues. In the health service alone, that could cost £175 million in the first year and that will come out of patient care. Labour's alternative is to leave the expenditure unfunded.

In 1975, I co-wrote for the Bow Group a pamphlet entitled "Under some Delusion". Incidentally, I co-wrote it with the person who is now the prospective Conservative candidate for Berwick-upon-Tweed. I am rather sorry that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is not in his place to hear one of the last public expenditure debates before the election. He may not be here after the election to appreciate such debates—if, as I expect to happen, my friend wins and becomes the admirable representative of that constituency.

The title of the pamphlet derives from a quotation from Edmund Burke to the effect that people give up their liberty only under some delusion. The delusion is that money taken from people into the hands of Government suddenly becomes virtuous as a result of that very process—that a financial transmogrification occurs. The Labour party fundamentally believes that £1 taken from an individual and spent by the Government is not only capable of doing more but is somehow morally better. The Conservative party has long known that that is simply not the case. If we did not know it, we are called to order from time to time by the Audit Commission and Select Committees, and told that money spent by the Government is not even necessarily spent efficiently.

The job of Governments is to concentrate on those things that have to be done by Governments and not on things that Governments are likely not to do as well as business or private individuals—certainly not as well as private individuals who take a personal interest in the way in which they spend their money, either generally or on charities.

The danger is that Labour would take us back to the bad old days. When Labour left power in 1979, our public sector borrowing requirement was £12 billion—6 per cent. of gross domestic product. Our public sector borrowing requirement is now 1·75 per cent. of GDP. That level is tolerable and leaves sufficient flexibility in the economy. A high public sector borrowing requirement, on the other hand, has significant adverse ramifications for private sector funding and interest rates.

The Government have shown that they are managing the economy properly and do not require increases in income tax. I see that the hon. Member for Derby, South is now in her place and I remind her that, under Labour,

such increases would be inevitable. The proper management of the economy does not require increases in income tax. Such increases are not required to increase tax receipts. Tax receipts have risen from £43·8 billion in 1988-89 to £55·5 billion in 1990-91. What is important is not increasing taxation rates but increasing the amount of enterprise and incentive in the economy, thereby creating wealth such as that which has enabled the present Government to increase public expenditure substantially while at the same time reducing the percentage of GDP that it represents. That is a remarkable achievement and one whose merits the Labour party has, sadly, still to learn.

Let me make one or two final points——

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): One.

Mr. Taylor: I shall make two final points.

First, it is important not to be dogmatic about the percentage of GDP taken by public expenditure—provided, that is, that the general target is a secular decline over a number of years. I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friends about the use of automatic stabilisers during a period of recession, which seems to me to be extremely relevant. I know that there will be criticisms in the media about the use of the reserve in this year's Budget—and, indeed, other criticisms. We should not be deterred, however, because it is already clear that the Government's long-term target is a balanced Budget and because, during this recession, it does not matter whether the percentage hovers above 41 per cent.

Secondly, we must continue to prioritise within public expenditure. I know a little about health and I am happy to note that the percentage of GDP spent by this Government on health is higher than that spent by Labour. That underlines the fact that not only do we run the economy better; we actually deliver the goods to the people. As we can spend more, as a percentage of GDP, on health, Labour will soon find that it does not have such a winner as it thinks in the public debate on health issues.

Whatever the level of public expenditure, it is important to spend the money efficiently. I therefore welcome the work of the Audit Commission and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and others who have highlighted that aspect in several speeches.

In the next Parliament—when we continue to be in government—we must ensure not only the proper management of the economy but the efficient management of public expenditure so that, in several of our high priority areas, such as health and education, we can ensure that there is better and more effective expenditure for the benefit of patients and school children. We must ensure that that is so for any given overall level of public expenditure. That is the task that we are setting ourselves and the task that we will achieve. I look forward to the Conservative Government continuing the implementation of their policies.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Keith Vaz.

Dr. Godman: Did you say Godman, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, my enunciation was very clear.

9.3 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I sat through several hours of debate on the Football Spectators Bill. One of the problems that we faced was to find a definition of "hooligan". Those of us who sat through the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) today were given a prime example of hooligan behaviour. The words and actions of Conservative Members were the words and actions of hooligans. The reason for such behaviour is simply that the Conservative Government are coming to the end of their time. These are the last few months of an Administration who have run into a great crisis and have run out of ideas. The Conservative party changed its leader and, therefore, the Prime Minister, but it retained all its policies—policies that have destroyed the lives of many thousands of my constituents in Leicester.

I want to speak very briefly about a number of aspects of the Government's public expenditure programme. I make no apology for saying that public expenditure should be increased in certain areas of Government policy. One such area is policing. Leicestershire has the worst crime record in the country. That is not because of lack of activity by the police. Indeed, I pay tribute to the work of the chief constable, Michael Hirst, and his officers. The reason for the lack of person power to police Leicestershire properly is that, despite the pleas from both sides of the House—pleas to Ministers during debates, and at meetings with Ministers, the most recent of which was with Lord Ferrers—the Government still refuse to provide the county with the police officers that it needs so desperately. As a result, the crime rate has escalated.

Only two weeks ago we asked that the Government make provision for the construction of the new police station on the Hamilton estate. We pointed out the dire need for a new divisional headquarters in the eastern part of the city.

The Government's response was that there is not enough money. They would not even look at the scheme until 1994-95. Residents of the outer estates of Leicester—places like Thurnby Lodge, Nether Hall and Northfields—complain about the high level of vandalism. This cannot be curbed without greater public expenditure, and that means greater expenditure by the Government.

Only this week we received the welcome news that Leicester City football club has remained in the second division. Yet the manager and chairman of the club say that they do not know how much longer they can remain solvent while they have to meet the huge cost of policing their matches. There is a need for increased Government expenditure to help clubs like Leicester and others that are not fortunate enough to have big gates.

As hon. Members know, Leicester is the centre of the footwear and textile industries. In 1979 those vital industries employed 440,000 people; by 1990, according to the Government's own figures, the number was down to 233,000—a loss of more than 207,000. That has had a tremendous effect locally. It has affected not only the people who have lost their jobs but the families of those people. The Government's plans contain no proposals to help those two industries. There is no incentive to invest. Every week we hear about another textile or footwear firm that is suffering because of the Government's policy of high interest rates.

Later tonight we shall have a debate about education. Recently I did a survey of schools in my constituency. If

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one adds together the number of years those schools have been waiting for repairs, one gets a total of 200. Schools, such as Abbey school—whether in the inner city or on the outer estates—need resources to get rid of some of the 60 mobile classrooms currently in use.

The same applies to the crisis in housing. Over the past 10 years Leicester city council has been robbed of £20 million of Government support for its housing programme. It cannot build any more houses. It is not allowed to spend for that purpose the money that it raises from the sale of council houses. As a result, I and other local Members of Parliament, at our surgeries every week, meet young couples in a state of great anxiety because they are unable to secure the housing that they need so desperately. That is not the fault of the city council, which works hard to ensure that transfers are effected as quickly as possible, and there is no question of a vast number of properties remaining empty. The reason why additional housing cannot be provided, and why so many people in the outer areas cannot obtain transfers, is that not enough money is spent by central Government.

There is so much more that I should like to say. There needs to be greater expenditure on the health service, and I want to know when the Government will impose surcharges on those Ministers who initiated the poll tax. If that had been done by local government, legislation would have been rushed through the House to surcharge the councillors responsible.

In the few moments left to me, I make a special plea on behalf of nuclear test veterans. As the House knows, a constituent of mine, John Hall, is dying of leukaemia—which he contracted while serving on Christmas Island. I have met the Prime Minister and other Ministers, and recently launched an appeal in Leicestershire to support John Hall and other nuclear veterans. I believe that some money could be found in the Government's programme to pay compensation to people such as John Hall.

By this time tomorrow, the Monmouth by-election will have been decided. I predict that Labour will take Monmouth, and it will do so because the people of Monmouth are fed up with the Government. My plea today is that the people of Leicester and the rest of the country should be given the same chance to pass their verdict on this, the most disastrous of Governments.

9.11 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As is quite often said these days, public expenditurre is good in many respects. Obviously one has to be careful how one spends the money. There are two purposes to public expenditure. The first is to care for and to help those who are unable temporarily or, sadly, permanently, to care for themselves. That area of public expenditure is one that this Government have built up. We have managed to refresh the parts that previous Governments have not reached.

The second is to ensure the provision of effective and adequate public services. That is not done by public expenditure alone. Today, I visited the channel tunnel. That service, facility and infrastructure will be made available, but it has not been paid for by the public. That is a totally refreshing change from previous Governments, who felt that everything of that kind should come out of the taxpayers' pocket.

Another area of public services is the water authorities. They are now in the private sector. The public—the people of this country—paid to buy them. So the taxpayer has had the money for those services, and now that those services are generating profits, they are providing the taxpayer with money yet again.

The Opposition go on about public expenditure—about spending more money, and about more plans for spending public money. They are going to buy the water authorities back. They are going to find more taxpayers' money to pay for that, and then they will lose the taxation on the profits in the future. So it is not what you do—it is how you do it.

One of the most important areas of public expenditure, recognised by both sides of the House—it is just the philosophy with which we approach it that is different—is the health service. Our approach is that we want to get more care for the cash. However much money we can make available—and we on this side of the House have made more money available than Labour did in the past or could in future—we want to make sure that it generates as much care as possible.

That is the reason we are going for hospital management trusts. A trust hospital will have control over its own destiny. It will run itself. It will manage itself, which will give it an incentive to be more effective and efficient. Not only that, but it will have a far greater awareness of the costs of what it does. By having that awareness of the costs, trust hospitals will be able to do more treatment for any given amount of money. They will want to have more people to come to them. They will want more business—more work, more care, more patients, more treatments and more effective use of our money. They will give more care for the cash.

The Opposition have talked ad infinitum about cuts and closures, but they do not tell us about the wards and the new hospitals that we open or about the additional treatments. Since the Government took office, they have increased the resources to the health service by more than a half. Is that a cut? Since the Government took office the number of doctors and nurses has increased—8,000 more doctors and 53,000 more nurses. Is that a cut? Since the Government took office, treatments, operations and in-patient treatments have increased by a third. Is that a cut?

We have plans to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the health service. The Opposition tell scare stories and take matters out of context. They tell us that they will not proceed with our reforms, so they will not achieve improvements in efficiency. Where will they get the resources from? We have been told that they will not increase taxation, apart from the 10 per cent. and 9 per cent. increases, and that they will obtain the money from growth. The money that will come from growth is already committed to old-age pensions and child benefit. Therefore, there will be no extra money for the health service and no improvement in that service.

We would return to the days of the previous Labour Government, when the International Monetary Fund was involved. Then there were cuts in the health service and in the amount of money spent. It was a question not of priorities and decisions about who should be treated, or of doctors and hospital management, but of the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, who were the Opposition's paymasters. The career of the Leader of the Opposition

depends on the unions. He is more concerned about receiving the approval of NUPE or COHSE than about providing an effective and efficient health service. They decide his destiny and his position as Leader of the Opposition.

The Government have rightly given more resources to the health service and the public sector. We have rightly encouraged the private sector to provide facilities that would not otherwise be provided. We have rightly managed to boost the amount of money to the taxpayer rather than reduce it.

By contrast, if the Opposition took office they would do what they did before: they would try to improve services, but they would not have the systems to do so. They would not make the reforms that we have made. They would either borrow money, as my hon. Friends have said, or, once again, mug every taxpayer and take money out of their wallets and handbags. We must avoid that.

9.17 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have been told by those who must be obeyed that I should be brief.

Amid the electioneering that is taking place here and elsewhere, the ordinary, decent people we represent have to continue to meet the challenges and deal with the problems they face in their everyday lives. I should like to consider whether the public expenditure plans come anywhere near matching the needs, interests and expectations of my constituents. I should like the Minister to ensure that my remarks are passed on to his ministerial colleagues. I have made similar requests before, and he has courteously done precisely that.

The unemployment rate in my constituency is 12·9 per cent. Thousands of people are unemployed, some of whom are categorised as long-term unemployed. Among its objectives, the Department of Employment's glossy brochure states:

"To help people to get jobs . . . To provide particular help to people who are long term unemployed . . . to make sure that unemployed people in receipt of benefits are available for and actively seeking work".

The unemployed people I represent are anxious to find work. In Scotland, the age-old Scottish solution is being applied to unemployment. It is the solution of migration and emigration. I want the Government to establish the restart programme. I must tell the Government that, in Greenock and Port Glasgow, those programmes are being handled with appalling sensitivity by Department of Employment and Department of Social Security staff. People who have been unemployed for many months are extremely sensitive to any "instructions" that they receive from the local benefit office, the local job centre or the DSS. They should be treated much more compassionately and sensitively.

Mrs Susan Coyle in Port Glasgow told me the other day that several of her friends have been treated in a disgraceful—she said "squalid"—way by officials as a result of the legislation which has introduced among other things the restart programme.

The Department of Social Security brochure claims among other things that the DSS claims to

"Provide a good service to customers—one which is professional, efficient, responsive and fair"

and to

"Ensure correct payments are made i.e. that benefit recipients are paid their correct entitlement".

That simply does not happen in the experience of many of my constituents.

About two years ago, over 1,800 shipyard workers and dockers applied for disability benefit in respect of the industrial injuries of vibration white finger, industrial deafness and other ailments. Many of those men are still waiting for the claims to be processed. The Department of Social Security in Stranraer, Greenock and Port Glasgow has treated those men with disgraceful insensitivity. Yet south of the border in the Sunderland area of the north-east of England, such claims have been dealt with much more speedily, efficiently and, dare I say it, generously. If people in the north-east of England can be treated in that way, the claimants on the lower Clyde should be treated with equal compassion and sensitivity. I hope that the Minister will pass my remarks on to his ministerial colleagues.

9.22 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I am sure that the whole House will wish to know that United won the European cup winners cup with a score of 2:1. I hope that that is right. I say that to get my speech off to a popular start.

The Chief Secretary got off to a traditionally raffish start to his address by referring to the timing of our debate. I was a little perplexed by that. In 1987, we had the debate on expenditure plans in February. We had the same debate in 1988 in February. In 1989, it was in February. In 1990, it was in February. This year, we are having the debate on 15 May.

I wonder why the Government delayed the debate. The suspicion among Opposition Members was that some new announcement, perhaps on training, was planned to claw back the Government's disreputable public expenditure position. But the Government have not managed to make such an announcement. As a substitute, they have had to settle for second best. They have scheduled today's debate on the eve of the Labour victory in Monmouth. But, of course, it was not their intention to give us a chance to praise ourselves before the voters went to the polls. The intention was that today's debate should act as the culmination of a 10-day campaign which the Conservative party has conducted on the Labour party's public expenditure and tax policies.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a moment.

The response that met the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) must be attributed to absolute hysteria, which was clearly induced by fear. I shall now give way to an hon. Gentleman who has more to fear than most.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am quaking in my shoes. The hon. Gentleman should not place his bets on the election results yet. Some of his colleagues lost money at the last election by predicting that I would lose my seat.

Will the hon. Gentleman clear up a point that was not adequately explained during earlier exchanges? Last year, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) told the House clearly and categorically that a future Labour Government would have only two spending priorities—pensions and child benefit. Since then, a succession of Labour Front Bench spokesmen have trooped through the Chamber and said that employment, training, trade and

[Mr. Oppenheim]

industry, health and overseas development would also be priorities. Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House, clearly and unequivocally, who is right?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South is undoubtedly right on matters of public expenditure. The hon. Gentleman will see shortly, once we are in government, that the Labour party Treasury team intend to keep a firm grip on public expenditure, for reasons that are perfectly obvious to everyone who has taken part in this debate so far.

Mr. Maude: Is the hon. Gentleman saying, therefore, that all those other Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are wrong?

Mr. Brown: That is absolute nonsense. When we ask the Government what the basic rate of income tax will be in the Chancellor's next Budget, they say that that is a stupid question. Yet when a shadow Minister is at the Dispatch Box, they expect him to spell out the Labour party's entire expenditure programme and to say precisely what priority will be given to which commitment. The Labour party has set out honestly and candidly its taxation policies and the areas of priority.

Mr. Maude: I asked a fair question. The hon. Gentleman has just said that the hon. Member for Derby, South was right when she said that there were only two priorities. I simply asked whether he is saying that all the other Front-Bench spokesmen were wrong to claim that there were a range of other priorities.

Mr. Brown: The Financial Secretary is going from bad to worse but, fortunately, his interventions will shorten his time, not mine. I say that in case anyone thinks that I am being foolishly generous in allowing him to intervene. He is relying on the misrepresentation of one of his hon. Friends.

Misrepresentation is becoming a stock in trade for the Financial Secretary. On the BBC "One O'Clock News" on 8 May, he said:

> "2½ per cent.—Labour Governments don't get that growth—the sort of growth we had in the 1980s".

That turns out to be completely wrong. First, from 1964 to 1969 under a Labour Government, the British economy grew at the rate of 2·8 per cent. a year; under Labour from 1974 to 1979, despite the quadrupling of world oil prices, the economy grew at the rate of 2 per cent. Secondly, in the 12 years of Conservative party rule, and despite the £100 billion-worth of oil revenues available to the Government, the economy has grown at only 1·75 per cent. a year—we are indebted to the Economic Secretary for that figure. Every Labour Government since the second world war has had higher average annual growth rates than their Conservative counterparts. It is hopeless for the Financial Secretary to suggest otherwise.

However, the Financial Secretary has one excuse—the Prime Minister has also been at it. I do not know what has happened to the modern Conservative party. They have gone from the iron lady to the tin man, from Boadicea to Frank Spencer. On 9 May, the Prime Minister said:

> "The reality is that the Labour party would never deliver any growth whatsoever to fund increased public expenditure. It never has and never would and any suggestion that it would is sheer wish fantasy."

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): What is "wish fantasy"?

Mr. Brown: I do not know. My hon. Friend will have to ask the Prime Minister—it would be a good question at Prime Minister's Question Time.

The Prime Minister continued:

> "The extra £20 billion that Labour promises is spending that it could never deliver out of growth which it has never previously provided when in government."—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 820, 822.]

That is factually inaccurate. We are happy to argue the issues with Conservative Members in a civilised way, but not on the basis of rant, which is all that is on offer.

We have said that we shall remove the ceiling on employees' national insurance contributions, which will affect people earning more than £20,000 a year. We have told the electorate that we intend to do that. Conservative Members do not seem to be aware of the phrase "marginal tax rates" and act as though the effect filters down to every penny an individual earns. We have given our statement, and the electorate will contrast that with a Conservative party that did not say that it would raise employees' national insurance contributions in 1981 by 2·5 per cent., not just for top rate earners but every national insurance contributor in the country.

Time is working against me in this debate. A number of Opposition Members made significant contributions, and one theme that came through more strongly than any other was Opposition Members' concern for the national health service. My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) rightly cited individual cases.

I shall describe an individual case, not just because it is important in itself, but because it is significant in relation to what is happening in the national health service. At the end of last week, I was telephoned by my general practitioner. One of my doctor's patients is an 83-year-old widow who has had a bowel tumour and a colostomy. She has been in hospital for radiotherapy but, sadly, the tumour is still there. She suffers from cataracts, cannot read, and is taking morphine to relieve the pain. The medical judgment of her medical practitioner is that she should be given a course of radiotherapy as an in-patient in Newcastle general hospital to try to alleviate the condition or at least relieve the pain.

At first, her specialist agreed that she would be given an appointment in ten days' time. But then the appointment was withdrawn because Newcastle general hospital—which is still operated by the health authority; it has not opted out—has decided that no patients from Newcastle will be admitted to Newcastle hospital for radiotherapy and treated as in-patients. The reason for that has nothing to do with clinical judgment; it would be impossible to make such a decision based on clinical judgment in advance of seeing the patient. The reasons for the decision are organisational and financial.

The radiotherapy service has lost 15 beds, but demand for the service has increased. In order to provide a service to the entire region, the hospital has contractual arrangements with neighbouring authorities that provide an income for Newcastle health authority, because the money has to follow the patient. The problem is that such money will not follow patients in Newcastle, because the health authority has to pay money to itself and it does not intend to do so. Therefore, there is no money to follow a citizen in Newcastle—just misery.

I shall not substitute my political judgment for that of a medical practitioner. The House will be relieved to know that my constituent has been given treatment. When I got in touch with the hospital and said that I intended to raise the matter in the House, it decided that her condition had deteriorated and that she now qualified for clinical treatment. Members of Parliament representing all parts of the country will be put in the impossible position of having to act as welfare officers, putting representations to hospital managements to ensure that elderly people get the sort of treatment that they should be entitled to in the first place.

Mr. Ian Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall finish my point, and then give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

The citizens of Newcastle are being told that none of them will be treated as in-patients. This might leave the local health authority in the absurd position of having to buy a safe house in Wallsend, over the border, and to move people who need in-patient treatment out of the district so that they can get into their own hospitals. I do not say that that would actually happen. Such an arrangement would be absurd, but it would be compatible with the market forces that the Conservatives encourage. The situation is outrageous. I cannot believe that this country would refuse an 83-year-old woman in such circumstances in-patient treatment under the NHS.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's constituency case, but I am glad that he has been able to play a part in ensuring that the lady gets her treatment. If he feels so strongly about the funding of the NHS, will he tell us by how much his party would increase expenditure on it above the figures in the White Paper?

Mr. Brown: Conservative Members seem to think that the health service is already properly funded. None of them has suggested otherwise. Indeed, the implication of tonight's motion is that the Conservative party's priority is tax cuts, not further public expenditure. The Opposition amendment says that the resources available from growth and from the tax changes that we have honestly announced to the electorate—the Conservative party never did that—should be used for our spending priorities, which embrace the NHS.

The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) should not be surprised that Labour Members feel so strongly about the NHS. During my visit to Monmouth, I found, as did other Opposition Members, that the health service was the biggest single issue that was raised. If Conservative Members are not willing to take that from me tonight, they will hear it from the electorate in the Monmouth by-election tomorrow.

Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate have concentrated on the Labour party's public expenditure and taxation plans. Despite the fact that the Governments public expenditure plans are the subject of the motion, Conservative Members did not seem to want to discuss them, or the documents in which they are set out. They preferred to discuss fictional versions of British history when the Labour party was in power—perhaps I should call that period current affairs rather than history —and hysterical versions of what they think will happen under the next Labour government. References to present Government policy seemed almost forbidden. They were not interested in that.

The obvious explanation for that is that, if the Government intend to reduce direct taxation—that has been their theme since 1979—the money has to be found from somewhere. We know where that money will be found: the Conservative party will adopt the same solution as it did in 1981, despite having pledged in 1979 to do no such thing. It is the same solution that the Government adopted to get themselves out of the mess that they got into with the poll tax. They increased value added tax in 1981 and increased it again by 2·5 per cent. in this year's Budget. If Conservatives seriously intend further to reduce direct taxation they will further increase indirect taxation.

I have heard no convincing denial of the Conservative party's secret plan to increase VAT. I shall give way if any Conservative Member wishes to make a straight denial. That is a generous offer, but it has not been taken up. I am surprised and a little disappointed by that. Surely somebody could manage at least a ritual denial of the sort that we had in 1979, when the then shadow Chancellor said that such an allegation by the Labour party was a wicked lie. He said that the Conservatives had no intention whatever of doubling VAT. It could be argued that he did not double it, and such a semantic point would remove some of the difficulty, but not all of it.

The debate about the Labour party's public spending and taxation policies was started about 10 days ago in the *Daily Express* by the Chief Secretary. At that time, Labour and the Conservatives were said to be running neck and neck in the opinion polls on Monmouth. Now Labour is well ahead in those polls, and a victory tomorrow in Monmouth is staring us in the face. If the Chief Secretary continues to attack us like that, the Opposition will soon be sitting on the Government side, and the Conservatives will be sitting over here.

9.41 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Traditionally, this debate enables the House to do two things. First, it is an important annual episode in the execution of the House's role in scrutinising Government spending. It also enables the House to probe policies on public spending.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) and the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) spoke about the format of the reports that are before the House. In reply to my hon. Friend, I do not think that the House is powerless in controlling and scrutinising public spending. It has an important role and, traditionally, the House has rightly taken it seriously. My hon. Friend said that he wished that the House had the same resources as the United States Congress. However, the size of America's budget deficit does not inspire a great deal of confidence in the scrutiny and control of public spending on the other side of the Atlantic.

The way in which the Government report to the House has developed very much in consultation with Select Committees, and has been guided by what those Committees have sought. We shall continue to consult, amend and improve the form of financial reporting to reflect the desires of the House.

The second function is to enable each side to probe policies, the way in which money is raised and spent, and

[Mr. Francis Maude]

the important division in philosophy between the Government and the Opposition. As the debate has illustrated, it sometimes seems that Labour's approach to public sector spending is rather like feeding a slot machine. They seem to think it inevitable that the more coins they put in at the top the more chocolate bars will emerge at the bottom. It does not quite work like that, especially when Labour is in power either in government or in councils. In such cases the slot machine becomes rather like a fruit machine, a one-armed bandit, because most of the money remains inside. That is not surprising because, after all, Labour is in hock to the public sector unions.

Yesterday, it was pointed out in the House—I do not think that it has been refuted—that a third of the parliamentary Labour party is sponsored by the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees. I am not suggesting that that inevitably colours the attitudes of Labour Members——

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I suspect the Financial Secretary's figures are just wrong. It is highly unlikely that COHSE and NUPE sponsor a third of the parliamentary Labour party.

Mr. Maude: I am reassured to hear that, but we shall be interested to hear the refutation. The suggestion was made in the House yesterday and it has not been refuted. Certainly, the majority of the parliamentary Labour party behave as though they were sponsored by COHSE and NUPE. That is why one can be morally certain that a Labour Government would ensure that the extra money raised from taxpayers will stick in the pockets of those who work in the state bureaucracies, instead of being translated into better services for citizens.

That is what we are seeking to change. We aim to make the public sector—central and local government, nationalised industries and the health service—work more efficiently so that the money supplied by the citizens as the taxpayer is translated into ever better services for the citizen as the user of them. The Prime Minister has initiated the most radical overhaul ever of the public sector, applying private sector market disciplines right across the board. *[Interruption.]* Let us hear what the Labour party has to say. We shall apply market disciplines, giving choice to the users of services and introducing competition wherever possible.

Mr. Graham: Will the Minister give an assurance to the elderly disabled woman whom I spoke to tonight that in future, instead of taking five days to get her wheelchair fixed, it will take one day at the most?

Mr. Maude: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are determined that the provision of public services will get better. We do not share the hon. Gentleman's blithe and dogmatic assumption that the only way to improve public sector services is by putting ever more money into them. That is why we have introduced wide-ranging reforms across the public sector and we shall continue to do that.

Introducing a commercial attitude to the public sector does not mean that everything will be sacrificed to short-term profit. The private sector does not flourish or create customer loyalty by treating its clients badly. It flourishes and creates loyalty because people have a choice. If they do not like what they are given, they can go elsewhere. Every change that has been introduced into the public sector has been aimed at delivering quality services.

Let us consider the introduction of executive agencies —'next steps' agencies—which are designed to improve efficiency and to give managers more control and more powers to enable their organisations to deliver better services. Let us consider one or two examples, even though I accept they are not in the mainstream of the provision of public services. The process has only just begun and there is a long way to go. It will be interesting to see whether the Labour party supports the process.

For example, in Companies House productivity rose by 6 per cent. and real unit costs fell by 5 per cent. in the first year that it was a 'next steps' agency. The average time taken to process documents was 12 days compared with 25 days in the previous year. In the vehicles inspectorate agency, cost efficiency in its four main functions improved by 4·5 per cent. against a target of 3·7 per cent. In Her Majesty's Stationery Office value-for-money improvements of 8·6 per cent., 12·6 per cent. and 12 per cent. have been achieved in its different functions. That is just an example of the sort of benefit that can be gained for the public sector and for the citizens, who will get the services that they expect the Government and the public sector to provide by making the money supplied by the taxpayer buy ever better services for the citizen.

Mr. Battle: One of the agencies is the Employment Service. How does reducing the number of employment offices from 2,000 to 1,000 increase the service as unemployment is obviously increasing? How is that a saving?

Mr. Maude: By the Employment Service becoming more efficient in the way in which it provides services for consumers; by ensuring that money goes further—which it does.

As regards the national health service, it is a pity that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) did not give an answer to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart), who made an outstanding speech.

The Labour party has argued repeatedly that the only thing wrong with the health service is that it does not have enough money in it. In 1987, the Labour party argued that it was underfunded and that it needed to be funded to the extent of 3 per cent. real growth per year. We have increased its real spending by 3·5 per cent. a year, but the Labour party says that it is still underfunded and that that is the only thing wrong with it. Labour cannot admit that there might be anything wrong with the way in which the NHS turns that money into patient care. We have steadily introduced a series of reforms into the NHS which are specifically designed to ensure that patient care increases and becomes ever better.

What about competitive tendering, which has provided savings of £120 million—money which has all gone into patient care? The Labour party says that it would abolish it, which means that £120 million would be taken out of patient care. Is that an example of how to make the health service provide better services for patients? Will the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East say that he is not going to get rid of competitive tendering?

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I understand the hon. Gentleman's arguments about efficiency. As he studies

these matters, I expect that he will have seen the report of the National Audit Office, which will tell him that a third of all the costs consumed by the social fund are spent on administration. Is that an example of Conservative efficiency?

Mr. Maude: I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman did not answer the question which we put to him about whether he would continue with competitive tendering in the health service, which has delivered better care for patients. Or is the Labour party so constrained by COHSE and NUPE that it is not able to contemplate the continuation of a policy which has yielded so many benefits for patients?

Direct care staff have increased from 59 per cent. of all staff in the health service to 67 per cent., which means more people in the health service are concerned with the direct provision of patient care. The number of doctors and nurses has increased dramatically—53,000 more nurses and midwives and 8,000 more doctors and dentists. That has been possible because the health service operates ever more efficiently and provides ever more treatment for ever more people. Every year, the health service has treated more people, more effectively.

Another example are the educational reforms, to loosen the control of bureaucracy and to give more control to parents. Grant-maintained schools, local management of schools and open enrolment are all designed to give more power to parents to insist that schools provide better schooling for their children. The money that they put in as charge payers and taxpayers comes out in better schooling for their children.

What is Labour's response to those reforms, which are designed to provide better care and better schooling? What did the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) say about grant-maintained schools? "On day one, we'll stop it. We'll turn the clock back," he said. As every day goes by the Labour party reveals itself as the real party of reaction, the party which wants to turn the clock back, the party which cannot conceive of the fact that local authority services can be provided by anything other than local authorities. All the public sector services have to be provided by people employed by the state. Services have to be provided by bureaucracy. The Opposition hate anything that gives to patients and parents real choice—the choice to control their destiny and what happens to them—because that takes people out of the power of the state and gives them independence and choice. The Opposition cannot stand that.

As for local authorities contracting out, just look at the city of Westminster. It has saved £4·1 million a year.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The hon. Gentleman referred to contracting out in hospitals. In my constituency, 400 employees of the Monklands district general hospital recently had their employment terminated because of contracting out. The company that now provides the services is offering the people whom it employs poorer wages and different hours but, most significant of all, no superannuation whatsoever. Does the Minister think that that is right?

Mr. Maude: The right hon. and learned Gentleman could not have better demonstrated where his real loyalties lie. They lie not with the patients who seek care in hospitals but with those people who are employed by the state. He could not better have demonstrated why we object to his approach to the national health service.

Mr. Smith: And the Minister could not more clearly have demonstrated where the Government's loyalties lie. I am proud to represent people in my constituency who work in my local hospital. It is absurd and disgraceful that they should lose their jobs and be offered other jobs without the possibility of superannuation. The Minister is on the side of employers who deny rights to my constituents.

Mr. Maude: The fact is that the Government are on the side of the patients who are treated in hospitals and of patients who are treated by general practitioners. We are on the side of parents who send their children to the schools of their choice. We are not on the side of the state and of the public sector unions who still hold the Labour party in thrall. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should be a little more careful about the way in which he opens up his party to criticism.

During the debate we have asked the Labour party a lot of questions but we have had precious few answers. During my right hon. and learned Friend's speech this afternoon I counted 13 questions to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). She half-answered two of them. That seems to me to leave a deficit of 11. We are still waiting to hear what the answers are. I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East another opportunity to let us know the answers to those questions.

What is the answer to the question about priorities? Does Beckett's law still apply, or do all the other Labour party Front-Bench spokesmen have authority to offer top priorities, key priorities, overriding priorities? What are the priorities? What would a Labour Government spend their money on?

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Mr. Maude: Is the hon. Gentleman going to intervene and tell us what the priorities are, or is he, as the hon. Member for Derby, South said earlier, going to give us the answers later? I suspect that they will be given much later. They will certainly not come when the Labour party is in government because it will never have the chance to be in government.

How will the Labour party fill the gap left by the proceeds of privatisation, forgone by its dogma? How will it raise the extra £5 billion? Will it mean an additional 2·5p on income tax? Will it mean £5 billion off spending? Will it mean borrowing extra money—a burden on future taxpayers? When shall we get the answers to those questions? What about the Leader of the Opposition's additional £20 billion? Does that come out of the growth that we have already provided for and already assumed for our services? When will there be answers to these questions?

The fact is that Labour are so obsessed with input that they don their motley as they go round the country, throwing around commitments to spending here, buying off an interest group there, and then they put on their dark suits to persuade the public that they do not really mean it. The fact is that we have seen enough of Labour promises. Labour are rattled, rumbled and wrong. They have made their promises, which are like pie-crust; they are made to be broken. People will not believe them.

[Mr. Maude]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—
The House divided: Ayes 177, Noes 298.

Division No. 144] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*

Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mallel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Government's Expenditure Plans for 1991-92 to 1993-94 (Cm 1501 to 1520); and contratulates the Government on continuing to maintain its medium term objective that public spending should, over time, take a declining share of national income, while value for money is constantly improved and resources are concentrated in areas of high priority.

Grant-maintained Schools

10.14 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I beg to move,

That the Education (Grant-maintained Schools) (Finance) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 353), dated 27th February 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 28th February, be revoked.

During the debates on the Education Reform Act 1988, the Labour members of the Standing Committee made it abundantly clear that they opposed the principle of grant-maintained schools. There were two reasons for our opposition. We felt that such schools would be wasteful of resources and discriminatory in their operation. These regulations and the experience of the past three years vindicate all the comments that we made four years ago in the Standing Committee. Grant-maintained schools have introduced into our education system a planning paralysis that bedevils attempts to rid the system of wasteful and expensive surplus places. It is a contradiction in the managerial position adopted by Ministers in the Department of Education and Science that, on the one hand—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Private conversations should take place outside the Chamber.

Mr. Fatchett: The existence of grant-maintained schools is an indication of planning paralysis and of a lack of managerial consistency and competence on the part of Ministers in the Department of Education and Science. On the one hand, the Department is told by the Audit Commission that it should get rid of surplus school places, of which there are more than 1 million, and each of which involves substantial cost; on the other hand, the Department encourages schools that are subject to possible reorganisation or closure to go for opted-out status. On the one hand, the Government impose pressures on local authorities to get rid of surplus places; on the other hand, the Department, for ideological reasons, encourages schools to opt out. This planning paralysis is imposing a heavy cost on the taxpayer.

We were right three years ago when we argued that the scheme would be wasteful. We were also right in our argument that it would be discriminatory. It is worth remembering the assurance that we were given by the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who was then Secretary of State for Education and Science. Every time the right hon. Gentleman was challenged during the debates on the Education Reform Act he said that there would be financial neutrality, with regard to both revenue and capital, in respect of the grant-maintained schools. When challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on 10 November 1988, the right hon. Gentleman replied that there would be financial neutrality in capital matters. In a letter to my hon. Friend, he gave a very clear assurance on that score.

We now have the record. Clearly, there is no financial neutrality. There is discrimination—brazen favouritism for opted-out schools. Anybody who reads these regulations will see how the dice are loaded in terms of both revenue and capital. A look at the details will reveal many examples of revenue bias towards grant-maintained schools. There is no sign of the financial neutrality that was talked about in the Standing Committee. This is a further indication of the fact that the word of education Ministers and their predecessors has little real value. On revenue, for instance, we see that the special purpose grant for development has been increased by 50 per cent. between 1990-91 and the current financial year. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) says, "Quite right."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I said, quite clearly, that they were victimised before. For example, the grammar schools in my constituency were consistently victimised by Lancashire education authority because it did not like them. Of course they opted out—and now, for the first time, they are getting a fair deal.

Mr. Fatchett: I am surprised to hear the hon. Lady say that. I will give her the figures. My previous ability to lip-read seems somewhat lacking, because I thought that the hon. Lady said something different. However, she made an interesting argument.

In terms of the special purpose grant for development, which basically covers teachers' in-service training, the 1991-92 figure for schools that have not opted out is £28 per child, per year. The figure for schools that have opted out is £41. How can the hon. Lady or any other Conservative Member justify that 50 per cent. difference in the figure for local authority and grant-maintained schools?

There is no question of any vendetta by Lancashire county council. The matter does not relate to the local authority, as the hon. Lady tried to suggest. It is simply a case of the dice being loaded to provide additional money for grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): At face value, the hon. Gentleman is saying that he has nothing against the principle of opting out, but thinks that we have not got the details quite right. What response would the hon. Gentleman make to the headmaster of a high school in Manchester who said, "Many parents round here vote Labour, and they don't understand why Labour politicians trust them to return a Labour Government, but do not trust them to run their own schools"? That is the question that the hon. Gentleman should answer tonight, but I do not believe for one moment that he will.

Mr. Fatchett: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say at the beginning of my remarks that we oppose the principle—and I am now putting some of the arguments about the detail. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's remarks later in my speech, with some enthusiasm.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and he spoke of wastefulness, paralysis and discrimination, but did not admit to his own prejudice or dogma. Why does he suppose that more than 2,000 schools expressed an interest in grant-maintained status?

Mr. Fatchett: The number of schools that have opted out represents less than 1 per cent. of the total. That figure is much more relevant.

As to discrimination and brazen favouritism, let us consider the figure on capital expenditure. The figure for local authority schools in the maintained sector is £83 per child for the current financial year. The figure for the grant-maintained sector is £326—four times higher. In some regions, the difference is even greater.

In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, the Secretary of State for Education said that the justification for that difference could be that individual grant-maintained schools had been neglected by their local authorities in the past. What a nonsensical argument for a Secretary of State to advance. If they had been neglected, how is that local education authorities individually knew which school to neglect?

The scheme came into operation only three years ago, yet according to the Secretary of State, the disparity that I described is due to accumulated neglect over a period of years. Is not the real answer that not just grant-maintained schools but all schools have been neglected by the Government, and that instead of meeting their responsibilities for all our children and schools, the Government are just meeting their responsibilities in respect of a small number of them?

We have a model for education that is the same that the Government advanced in respect of the health service. It is a two-tier model, clearly based on the opt-out principle. We know that hospital opting out has been rejected throughout the country because it is based on a two-tier system whereby a small number of hospitals benefit, but the vast majority miss out.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Fatchett: If the hon. Gentleman waits a minute, he will enjoy the next part of my speech.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) tried to justify that discrimination and elitism by arguing that there is choice. However, there is no choice in a system that is deliberately designed to benefit a few to the cost of the overwhelming majority. There is no equity in that principle. The programme of opt-out schools is the education equivalent of queue jumping in the national health service, and Conservative Members know it.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has spent the past few minutes comparing education with the national health service. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that hospitals that want to opt out should hold ballots. Why does the Labour party wish to deny a ballot to people who want schools to opt out?

Mr. Fatchett: It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman did not read the debates on the Education Reform Act 1988. If he had done so, he would know the answer. We said that a ballot should involve the whole community rather than a limited number of parents who are affected at the time.

The language of choice is false, and we all know it. Those of us who visit schools and have practical experience know that there is simply no choice for many parents and children. Where is the choice for children at Killinghall first school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney), who have been educated in temporary accommodation for the past seven years? Where is the choice for the hundreds and thousands of children who are being educated in crumbling schools? Where is the choice for children who suffer a shortage of books in the classroom and of equipment for science and technology lessons? That is not choice. The real choice in education will be provided when we have a system based on equity and rights for all parents rather than choice for just a few.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Why does not the hon. Gentleman visit St. James Church of England school in Bolton? What choice did parents of its pupils have? The local authority tried to kill it off, but as a grant-maintained school it is now enormously popular.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): The hon. Gentleman has never visited a grant-maintained school.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) always opens his mouth with little evidence to support what he is saying.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Where is Bolton?

Mr. Fatchett: I live on the other side of the Pennines, so I have a fair idea where Bolton is.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the hon. Gentleman is finding it so difficult to answer a straightforward question about where Bolton is, would it be in order to point out to him that a Labour councillor in Bolton was expelled from the Labour party for three years for supporting opting out?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Let us get on with the debate.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Member for Darlington accused me, as usual without any evidence, of not having visited a grant-maintained school, but I have done so.

Mr. Mans: Where is Darlington?

Mr. Fatchett: The last time I went to Darlington, I scored 50 runs playing cricket. I remember it very well. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it was a very good innings and was reported in local papers.

The hon. Member for Darlington said that I had not visited a grant-maintained school. I have visited more grant-maintained schools than the Secretary of State has visited local education authority schools. If the hon. Member for Darlington spent less time watching "Neighbours" and telling the country what to watch on television and knew more about education, he would be more useful in his capacity.

Not only the Labour party objects to grant-maintained schools and the principle of them. *The Times* objects. In an editorial it referred to the evils of opt-out. Conservative Members have referred to local councillors. Let me remind them of the case of Joan Bryant. She might be known to some Conservative Members. She was the former Conservative chairman of Bromley education committee. She resigned from that position for one simple reason. She objected to opt-out and, in language that could have come from the Labour party—she was right to use that language—she said that opt-out was wasteful and divisive.

Not only the Labour party but *The Times*, many other sectors and Conservative education spokespersons on local authorities object to opting out. We have made it clear that a future Labour Government will seek parliamentary powers to return opted-out schools to local authority provision. We shall denationalise the schools. We shall return them truly to the parents, under local management of schools. There will be no vendetta against the schools. No teachers will be sacked. But we shall return the schools to the LEAs, because we believe that all our children should have an equal right to educational opportunity.

[Mr. Fatchett]

From the debates of the past few weeks on not only education but health and every other issue, it has been clear that we have ambition for the public sector. We have ambition for the education of all our children, not just for a fortunate few. It is for that reason that we shall abolish the principle of grant-maintained schools. We shall raise standards for all our children in all our schools and we shall give to parents the right to equal opportunity in our education system. We shall end the principle of opt-out, and for that reason, we shall vote against the regulations.

10.31 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): The last time the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) was at the Dispatch Box, he spent 25 minutes obfuscating the Labour party's position on the teachers' pay review body. At least tonight we had a clear explanation, about which we shall make sure that parents throughout the country learn. The Labour party is determined to destroy choice for parents, to destroy good schools and to undermine the democratic wishes of parents' as expressed in the ballot boxes, to have grant-maintained schools.

Tonight we heard the echo of old-fashioned socialist orthodoxies. Parents should be seen and not heard. The nanny state and nanny LEAs know the answer. I am not surprised that the Opposition decided to pray against the regulations. The one thing that we know about the Opposition's education policies is what they are against. They are against diversity. They are against choice. They are against opportunity. They are against grant-maintained schools. They are against the technology schools. They are against grammar schools. They are against the assisted places scheme. They are against looking to the future. They are in favour of looking back to the drab uniformity that they imposed on Britain in the late 1970s.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Is my hon. Friend aware of a little problem that the Labour party has—that in Islwyn, the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition, Cwm Carn comprehensive school has successfully become grant-maintained? Apparently that has been welcomed by Labour members of the governing body.

Mr. Eggar: Indeed, I understand that the campaign for opting out was led by a Labour councillor, just as the campaign for Stratford school in Newham to opt out was led by a Bromley Labour councillor. That is what the grass roots of the Labour party supports. When people see the needs of their local schools they are among the leaders of the campaign for opt-out status. Opposition Members of Parliament are simply out of touch.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Minister knows that that particular Labour councillor wanted to become a teacher at the school that he was trying to persuade to opt out and was even trying to turn it into a Muslim school, so he should not try to mislead the House.

Mr. Eggar: That is an interesting example of brotherly love within the democratic Labour party. I know that the hon. Gentleman does not like Councillor Singh or the fact that the parents of children at Stratford school voted to opt out. Those parents rejected the outright intimidation by Newham local education authority.

Mr. Scivetti, a parent at Stratford school, said in a letter:

"The children once isolated are then questioned before the class to give their reasons for wanting to stay in a school with no future. As a parent of one of the children treated in this way, I find this intolerable."

I look to the hon. Gentleman for Newham, North-West, in whose constituency that happened, to condemn such activities, which were promoted by Newham LEA and supported by teachers within the school. Mr. Scivetti's letter continued:

"Those particularly vulnerable under this onslaught are the parents from the large ethnic communities who have great respect for authority and do not want trouble."

The hon. Gentleman should support Stratford as a grant-maintained school, just as I presume he supports the other schools in his constituency.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not support Stratford as a grant-maintained school, and the Minister knows why. The only reason why Stratford opted out was that it was due for closure. The Minister's cheap Tory dogma led that school to get grant-maintained status. It had nothing whatsoever to do with educational standards.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is much more at home as the House of Commons jester than showing synthetic indignation on behalf of Newham LEA.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It was not synthetic indignation but indignation at the fact that people can vote to determine their children's future. That is what the hon. Gentleman does not like. Why did he not take the opportunity, while he was on his feet, to condemn the fact that the Labour-controlled council in Avon even denied a bus pass to an 11-year-old girl because whe went to a grant-maintained school?

Mr. Banks: I do not represent Avon.

Mr. Eggar: The Labour party is also making direct threats against teachers at grant-maintained schools. Stephen Byers, leader of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and a Labour parliamentary candidate, directly threatened teachers at GM schools when he said that LEAs

"will be extremely reluctant to employ people, especially head teachers and deputies, who have already embraced . . . opting out."

So much for Labour caring about teachers' careers and their conditions of service.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that the children of the Leader of the Opposition went to a school in my constituency? I know that he thinks highly of that school, but it has voted by a large majority to opt out.

Mr. Eggar: There are examples all around the country of parents getting together with governors, teachers and headmasters, and deciding that the way forward for their schools and children is by taking grant-maintained status. The school in Ealing is just one example of many.

Mr. Fatchett: A few moments ago, the Minister said that the Labour party's policy was to operate a vendetta against teachers in grant-maintained schools. I made it

abundantly clear in the final part of my speech that there would be no vendetta against those involved in grant-maintained schools. We have said that before.

The Minister referred to Stephen Byers, chairman of the AMA education committee. If the hon. Member did not rely just on the *Daily Mail* for his news coverage, he would find that I spoke on the same platform at that conference. Within five minutes of Stephen Byers finishing his speech, I made it abundantly clear, and it was reported in the newspapers, that the official Labour party policy, not the AMA policy, is that there will be no vendetta against the children and teachers in those schools. It ill behoves the Minister to go round peddling those lies time after time. It is about time that the Minister started to tell the truth and make the record clear.

Mr. Eggar: I am sorry that Peter Mandelson did not get the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) and Mr. Byers together. Neither the hon. Member for Leeds, Central nor Mr. Byers has denied that Stephen Byers made that statement, and Mr. Byers has not withdrawn it. The Labour party is committed to withdrawing the right of parents to vote freely for their school to opt out. What is more, the Labour party is determined to destroy the GM schools that have decided to opt out and return them to their former status without any democratic vote.

I said that a large number of schools—2,000—had expressed serious interest in grant-maintained status. There are now 62 grant-maintained schools in operation. We have approved 77 applications, while 45 more proposals for GM status have been published and will reach Ministers for decision shortly. Some 24 more proposals are awaited following parental ballots in favour of seeking grant-maintained status and 75 schools are committed to holding ballots in the next few weeks. In the past six months, the total number of schools to vote in favour of GM status has doubled from 80 in November 1990 to 160 now.

Mr. Thurnham: The Labour party says there are to be no vendettas but is my hon. Friend aware that Councillor Hardman, who was expelled from the Labour party, was re-elected as an independent Labour councillor on 2 May? Does that not show that people want schools to have the freedom to choose and not to be subject to the dogma and ideology of the Labour party?

Mr. Eggar: Of course, people want to be able to choose the future for their schools and children. That is why we have such overwhelming support for GM status, and why those schools with GM status have been so successful—they have the support of parents and children.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Minister heard my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) give massive amounts of data about the bribing that is going on to get schools to opt out as opposed to remaining in the state sector by offering vast amounts of money per child. Why does not the Minister answer the accusation, which all hon. Members know is true, that many of the schools which opted out—only 1 per cent. did so—were due for closure and decided to opt out so that they could remain open when otherwise they would not have had enough pupils to do so.

Mr. Eggar: As ever, the hon. Gentleman is out of date. A small minority of schools that now have GM status faced section 12 or section 13 closure notices at the same time, but many of them have been remarkably successful and have enjoyed a huge increase in the number of pupils applying to attend them.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central discussed whether there are financial advantages in schools becoming grant-maintained. There are. The schools spend in the schools the money that was previously spent on their behalf by the LEAs—and they spend it as they choose to. The orders, to which the hon. Gentleman did not once refer, stipulate a 16 per cent. add-on for GM schools. That 16 per cent. comes from the contribution that the LEAs would otherwise make to the funding of such schools centrally. Many parents who vote for GM status do so because they believe that the schools will spend the money better than the LEAs——

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister now respond to the parliamentary questions that I have tabled and explain how the 16 per cent. figure was arrived at? The average figure for LEAs with opt-out schools was 14 per cent. Will the 16 per cent. last for another two years, since the Government appear to be proposing to cut the delegated budget further? The 16 per cent. figure bears no relation to economic reality; the Government plucked it out of the air, so as to put more money into GM schools.

Mr. Eggar: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has not done his homework. He is not comparing like with like. He knows perfectly well that the 16 per cent. standard figure for the central annual maintenance grant element is based on the average for the GM sector in the 1990-91 financial year. We shall look at that in the light of experience with a view to starting in January 1993——

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): The debate should go no further without our challenging the empty rhetoric of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who says that the Labour party is in no way vindictive to the children who attend GM schools. The fact is that the Labour party gives support to councils such as Birmingham, which will not even allow the pupils of the opted-out school in Small Heath to use the city's libraries, or the pupils of Baverstock school to use the school swimming pools; and to the Labour council of Tameside, which prevented a young boy from representing the under-15 Tameside cricket team because he happened to go to an opt-out school.

Mr. Eggar: That is the true face of the Labour party. It ignores the democratically expressed wishes of the parents —*[Interruption.]* What is worse, Opposition Members are laughing about it. They admit that they have no control over Stephen Byers, the Labour leader of the AMA, but we would expect them to have some control over Labour-led councils. Not a bit of it. They do not disown such councils: they condone their activities, as my hon. Friend says.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Will my hon. Friend join me in praising the good sense of the parents of Wolverhampton who only last week persevered, through him, to achieve opt-out status for Moseley school? I am afraid to say that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) is not in his place to praise those parents. Despite blatant political intimidation by the local Labour council, they persevered and exercised their choice in the interests of their pupils.

Mr. Eggar: A remarkable feature of the debate is that there are more Labour Front-Bench spokesmen than there are Labour Back-Benchers. The reason is that Labour Members, with the exception of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), are frightened to turn up because they know about the popularity of grant-maintained status and do not want to be seen to oppose parents' rights to opt out.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I am grateful to the Minister for giving me the opportunity to explain the whereabouts of my colleagues. They are in Monmouth, and we understand why Conservative Members are so frightened to go there.

Mr. Eggar: Many parents with children at grant-maintained schools, and many schools thinking about grant-maintained status will notice the absence of their Members of Parliament and will wonder why they remained silent.

Mr. Straw: It is late.

Mr. Eggar: Are Labour Members now part-timers who do not bother to work beyond half-past seven? That will also have to be drawn to the attention of the constituents of Opposition Members. That remark by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was a real gaffe.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: Yes, for the last time.

Mr. Allason: Bearing in mind the fact that it is Labour's official policy to return all grant-maintained schools to the control of local authorities, what advice would my hon. Friend give to parents, headmasters, schools and school governors who are contemplating an application for grant-maintained status?

Mr. Eggar: I would say two things: first, vote Conservative and, secondly, at the next election campaign put Labour candidates on the spot. Ask the candidates, preferably at meetings in schools, to set out their policy and say whether they agree with official Labour policy. If they agree with that policy, the news can be circulated to all parents in the schools that Labour and its candidates intend to destroy the schools that parents have worked so hard to support and build up.

I am delighted at the result of the debate, because it has shown yet again that Labour is stuck in a time warp. The real world is moving on. The Opposition may not trust parents, but the parents and children of this country can be sure that we trust them to decide the best education for their children.

10.52 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): One of the people who work for us here has told me that his street has been cabled and that people there receive 24-hour coverage of our proceedings. I am not convinced that people watching this debate—there may be one or two—will think that it reflects much credit on the House or has been of much advantage to parents who are concerned about the education of their children.

Much heat has been generated, but little reference has been made to the detail of the regulations that we are here to debate. There has been no real attempt to address the position of the 99 per cent. of schools that have not opted out, or to try to solve the problems in schools that have not been given the financial advantages of grant-maintained status.

If the Government could promise every school the financial backing that they are giving to grant-maintained schools, many of education's problems could be solved, but it is clear from Government budgets that they have no intention of doing so. They cannot expect every school to opt out, because they have not applied the financial muscle that would allow that to happen.

That is why hon. Members, at least those on the Opposition Benches, talk about the creation of a two-tier system. The policy is clearly designed around a small, financially enhanced sector of grant-maintained schools as opposed to the large majority of local education authority schools that do not have that financial backing.

The evidence of the differential in finances between the two is clear. The figure has already been given tonight. Any hon. Member who doubts it can easily look it up. There is nothing suspect about it. It is clear and factual and can be found in answers to questions asked in this place.

I draw hon. Members' attention to that because we must address ways of generating support and enhanced education in 100 per cent. of our schools, not in 1 per cent. That should be the main agenda which we debate rather than generating the kind of heat that we have seen tonight over a tiny minority.

The regulations take forward yet another step that differential in funding. But they do so in a rather peculiar and arbitrary manner, of which I am not sure that Conservative Members are aware. It should be a matter of concern to them because——

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: Let me elaborate this point and then I shall be happy to give way.

When the legislation was introduced we were told that grant-maintained schools would not receive more money than neighbouring LEA schools. But quite apart from the argument about the current situation, we find that the regulations introduced tonight achieve precisely that. Schools in LEAs which hold less than 16 per cent. of the schools's budget centrally—there are at least 34 on the figures of the Department of Education and Science—will now be given an additional incentive to opt out because they will end up with more money than schools remaining with the LEA, simply because of the averaging process that the regulations introduce.

That is an incentive that may prove impossible to ignore when schools are so badly underfunded. Nobody can be surprised at or criticise a school governing body which looks at the financial incentives that are on offer and finds it hard, however much they may disagree with the principle, to argue to parents that the school should reject the financial opportunities that are being offered because of an ideological or teaching objection. They may believe that that is not the right way to go, but for the sake of the children in the school, a few may decide that they must take the bribe which the Government said that they would not offer, but which in practice they do offer.

It is in those LEAs that delegate most to their schools that there is the greatest financial bribe to opt out. In other words, the schools in what in the Government's terms in one respect are the best LEAs are being paid to opt out from that LEA.

That may affect some Conservative Members because, by contrast, a school in an LEA which does not decentralise its budget and delegate to the average level that is used in these figures, will be financially penalised for opting out. Those schools in the LEAs which in the Government's terms least accept the Government's policies and are behaving most badly in the Government's terms will face a financial penalty if they opt out of the LEA. What an extraordinary measure to be introducing tonight.

I came here tonight assuming that that would be the main feature of the debate. It seemed reasonable. It is a rather extraordinary thing for Ministers to be proposing even within their own terms. It has not yet been debated in any detail. It was mentioned in passing in a question, but that was it. Yet that is the reality of the regulations that Conservative Members will march through the Lobby and support.

Perhaps all the Conservative Members sitting opposite represent the 34 local authorities that go above average in delegation of finances to schools. So they may be arguing and voting for those schools in their areas to have that advantage—that would perhaps be understandable. However, it would seem extraordinary if, as I would imagine, at least some of those Conservative Members are going to vote tonight to penalise schools for opting out —a policy which I do not agree with. We have heard them arguing throughout the evening that they agree with it, yet they will be voting for a financial penalty on it.

The regulations should be rejected by Opposition Members because we disagree with the principle, and by Conservative Members because they would be voting for something which will work counter-productive to the very thing that they are arguing for.

Mr. Hind Are we to understand from what the hon. Gentleman has said that he is doing what local authorities such as Lancashire are doing—everything they possibly can to discourage schools and parents from choosing grant-maintained status? Setting aside the arguments about cost, which he has put forcefully and which Conservative Members do not agree with, would the Liberal Democrats refuse parents the choice of grant-maintained schools?

Mr. Taylor: The answer to that is clear, and we make no pretence about it—we do not believe in the principle of grant-maintained schools and we would not have them. In a moment, I shall elaborate what we would do, which may be helpful to the debate.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Would the hon. Gentleman advise me what I might tell parents

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

with children at the Hardley school in the constituency—a school of about 680 pupils—who have voted for grant-maintained status and the majority of whom have just voted SLD in the local government elections? There is also an SLD county councillor and I congratulate the SLD candidates on winning. Would the hon. Gentleman tell me, in words that they would understand, precisely what is the SLD policy on grant-maintained status, and what I should tell parents of children at the Hardley school, which was the first to take grant-maintained status in Hampshire?

Mr. Taylor: Among other things, the hon. Gentleman should tell them that they will shortly have a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament to add to the county and district councillors, but I do not know the details of the area. I certainly hope that that is the way things are going—from what the hon. Gentleman has said, that appears to be the case.

I shall elaborate on how we should be approaching this matter. We should not be in the business—as the Government have been—of nationalising the control of schools. Bringing ministerial control over schools does not seem to be to introduce greater diversity. Neither should we be in the business of creating a two-tier system of education, with some schools financially rewarded, but most continuing to go without.

By bringing schools within the local education authorities, we should be saying that the LEA's role is not to dictate to schools how they should operate, or to control them, but to be enablers and to ensure that special needs education provision is available, that quality is of the best sort and that a school place is available to every child.

The control of education—the form in which it is delivered and its growth—should be achieved through the school.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight) *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I shall give way in a moment.

That is why we seek to set every school free, not a few or just 1 per cent.—and to give every school greater independence within the LEA. That policy maximises diversity and choice and maximises local rather than national control. It ensures a policy that is directed at 100 per cent. of our children rather than one that is directed at just 1 per cent. of our children.

Mr. Field: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the only Liberal Democrat-controlled local education authority in the shire counties—the Isle of Wight county council—sacked a number of school governors after the Liberal Democrats won the last election? If that is not dictatorship, what is it?

Mr. Taylor: It is gratifying to respond to a number of hon. Members who will be replaced by Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament at the general election. The answer is contained in a letter that I recently received from one of the Education Ministers. He levelled criticism at both Labour and Conservative authorities that choose to appoint only governors from the ruling political party, whether Conservative or Labour. The only party that is prepared in every area of the country to argue that governing bodies should reflect the plurality of views in the community is the Liberal Democrats. That was made absolutely clear in the letter that I received from the Minister. It clearly picks out both Labour and Conservative councillors for doing exactly the opposite. It rightly criticised them for doing so.

I have put forward clear reasons for opposing the draft regulations, whether one is for or against grant-maintained schools. The policy that the Minister has set out, upon which he has made no comment, penalises those schools that opt out in local authorities that do least to delegate to schools, and helps those schools to opt out in local authorities that do the most to delegate to schools. What an extraordinary policy to pursue. It will not go unremarked among those who are struggling in areas where local education authorities do not delegate to schools that Conservative Members wish to penalise those who support grant-maintained schools and want to pursue that option.

11.7 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I listened with interest to the two Opposition speeches, particularly to that of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). Let me give both the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues a word of warning. They make exactly the same mistake with grant-maintained schools as they did with the sale of council houses. The Opposition will be forced to change their policy and to adopt the policy that is advocated by this side.

The only point to come out of the speech of the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) was that we now know where the Liberal party apparently stands. It opposes the concept of grant-maintained schools. That is the signal that this House should send out to the country—that if grant-maintained schools are here to stay, it will only be because of the work of Conservative Members.

Grant-maintained schools receive funding direct from the Department of Education and Science without losing the 15 per cent. that is creamed off by local education authorities. That point was made by the Minister. That 15 per cent. will go to schools. I am convinced that schools know best how to spend their own allocation of money without the intervention of the bureaucrats or administrators at shire hall or elsewhere. That is the reason why local management of schools is proving to be so successful. Grant-maintained status takes that a stage further. In the main, parents know best what is right for their children and, equally, most schools know best what is right for their pupils. I therefore welcome the greater freedom that grant-maintained schools enjoy. I regret the attitude adopted by some local education authorities whose intention is to make the path of grant-maintained status more difficult than the House intended when it passed the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is my hon. Friend aware of the leaflet issued by the director of education of the metropolitan borough of Dudley, in which he says:

"Essentially the local authority believes that grant-maintained schools should be isolated"?

He goes on:

"In particular, the local authority would insist that all officers/advisers . . . do not co-operate in whole or in part with grant-maintained schools"

on, among other things,

"access to bulk purchase agreements".

How small-minded can one be? Surely that is cutting off one's nose to spite one's face.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

I should like to give an example from my local education authority of the unhelpful attitude being adopted. I want to quote briefly from a letter produced by Warwickshire county council addressed to all head teachers and chairmen of governing bodies.

I have to say, in all fairness, that the letter makes it clear "that for many schools the short-term financial benefits associated with opting out are considerable."

The only query I have about that statement is the insertion of "short-term". The benefit are indeed considerable.

The leaflet also says that the education committee decided in April this year

"to delay any planned capital works in a school where a parental ballot is being held so that if a 'yes' vote results, LEA schools may be more fully supported."

I believe that decision to be unfair, unjust and totally unwarranted. The parents of children at schools considering grant-maintained status have paid through their community charge and through their taxes for the upkeep of those schools. Therefore, they should be supported by the LEA until the school becomes grant-maintained. To do otherwise is inequitable and disregards the contributions made by parents over the years.

Warwickshire is not alone. I am obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) for his comments about Dudley. Clearly, the chief education officer of Dudley believes that the LEA is privileged and that only the LEA is capable of delivering good education to the nation's children. I have news for both that chief education officer and for Opposition Members: grant-maintained schools are here to stay because parents want them. If the Labour party, which has made so much of ballots in other connections, intends to ignore the wishes of parents—[AN HON. MEMBER: "And Liberals."] I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that comment. If the Labour party and the Liberals, too, choose to ignore the expressed wishes of parents, they do so at their peril.

I should like briefly to touch on a telling point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) about a question during Prime Minister's Questions yesterday. The Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition said:

"Does the Prime Minister recall saying, just last Friday, that he trusts the people? Why does he not trust the people enough to allow them to vote democratically on whether they want their local hospitals to opt out? What is he afraid of? Why is he always running away from the ballot box?"—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 148.]

Let me tell Opposition Members that on grant-maintained schools they are running away with the ballot box. If they have confidence in what they are doing, let the people decide.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: While my hon. Friend is on the subject of the two-tier Labour policy approach, has he noticed that Labour and Liberal Members often support the United Nations when they want, but they do not support the United Nations declaration on human rights which says that parents have a prior right to the choice of their children's education? Opposition Members believe that bureaucrats and politicians have the prior right. That is where they are inconsistent, and it is why parents will reject them.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention.

I remind the House that grant-maintained schools are created as a direct result of parental commitment. They are what parents want, as distinct from what some educationists and chief education officers think they want. Grant-maintained status comes about only as a result of a free vote of parents expressed through a ballot.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No, my hon. Friend must forgive me if I continue.

With the benefit of funding set out and confirmed by this statutory instrument, grant-maintained schools will be one of the engines for educational changes. I say in parenthesis that the benefits that accrue to grant-maintained schools are not merely financial. The greatest benefit to grant-maintained schools is the independence that they enjoy. The apron strings that secure them to the local education authority are cut. That was the point made by the chief education officer in Dudley.

In their usual vindictive and spiteful fashion and in their unceasing drive for greyness and uniformity, the Opposition have become the party of the new abolitionists. They will abolish grant-maintained schools, they will abolish grammar schools, they will abolish city technology colleges and they will abolish the assisted places scheme. They seek to abolish even the tax concessions that enable independent schools to survive. The reason is the same in each case—they believe that such schools are a threat to the established order of the neighbourhood comprehensive. The Labour party has become as fossilised in its beliefs as the dinosaurs, and it will go the same way.

11.16 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I came tonight to listen and had not intended to speak, but the Minister questioned why I was here. The reason why I —a Front Bencher who speaks on other policies—came to listen was simple.

Leaving aside the rhetoric and hot air that we have heard, I represent a constituency that contains the largest opt-out school. It has 2,000 pupils and, to the best of my knowledge, no other school as large as Great Barr has opted out. The ballot was hotly contested and the staff voted against opting out. I speak from memory without the benefit of the files, but I believe that the turnout was about 60 or 61 per cent., which I thought deplorable. I was ashamed that about 39 per cent. of my constituents did not vote on such an important issue. The decision to opt out succeeded by only about 60 votes. Thirty-one per cent. of the parents carried that decision. I emphasise that it was 31 per cent. of parents with children at the school, not the parents with children at the dozen or so feeder schools.

That deals, by the way, with a point made about the health service. If there were ballots in the health service, it would not be only the patients in the hospital at the time of the ballot who voted, but the community. The same argument applies to schools—those who vote should not be merely the parents who have children in a school in a snapshot in time. If the decision to opt out in a school that has 2,000 pupils and is probably the second or third largest secondary school in England can be carried by 31 per cent. of the vote, it sets a high-risk strategy for the future.

I fear for the future of Great Barr school. I attended it when it was a traditional secondary modern. It holds Jeff Rooker's *Hansard* library—all the bound copies of

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

Hansard that I have received are there. Even when a fire raiser burned down the library last year, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the insurance company replaced the copies which will continue to go there as that is where they have always gone. I do not draw any distinctions. I am dealing with my constituents, the children of my constituents and the school, and there should be no difference in the way that one represents and takes an interest in them. I am worried, however, because such a momentous decision was taken by only 31 per cent. of the parents. That is dangerous.

The Conservative parliamentary candidate for my constituency did not speak in favour of the opt-out when the struggle took place last year. There was complete silence on that front. I have no doubt that he holds views that he has decided not to express.

The opt-out did not follow the threat of closure—I am talking of one of the most successful schools in Birmingham. Indeed, I would argue that it is the most successful in the city. Its pupils went to every university and polytechnic in the country before it was confronted with the decision whether to opt out. Leaving aside difficulties with the fabric, the school was immensely successful. It was money alone that dictated the decision to opt out. There is a massive budget of millions of pounds, and there was a straight half a million on the line initially. What group of governors will pass up about £500,000? The governors knew that at the end of the day the money would come from other schools. That touched the consciences of some of them, but the general feeling was, "We put our school first. It is someone else's job to put his school first." I drew the issue to the attention of the governors and I received no reply.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rooker: I ask my hon. Friend to forgive me for not giving way. I wish to speak for only a few more minutes.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) has left the Chamber. I venture to suggest that he left when he saw me seeking to participate in the debate. I have a question for the hon. Gentleman. I think that I am the only Labour Member who has a Tory Member chairing the governing body of a secondary school in his constituency. I should explain that it is not the school to which I have been referring. It is, of course, a school that is some way from Wyre Forest. What has the hon. Gentleman done to get the governing body that he chairs to take advantage of the great opt-out scheme? As I said, the hon. Gentleman is not in his place. At some stage, I should like an answer to my question. The hon. Gentleman skirted the issue this evening.

During the next general election I shall fight to bring all schools within the same service, with the maximum devolution and delegation of management power to their heads. I do not want the dead hand of bureaucracy to bear down on our schools any more than is necessary. In other words, I want an education service. I do not want groups of schools competing and vying with one another in an effort to do down their competitors so that they can secure more money, thereby damaging pupils and education prospects in other schools. I am not prepared to put up with that. I make no bones about it, I want the opted-out schools brought back within the education service. They are presently outwith it, and that is not good for the future.

The vital ballot will be the general election. The people will make the decision. It will not be left to the parents or the staff of the school. Instead, the issue will be decided by the widest possible spread of the community.

I have referred to Great Barr school, and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest chairs the board of governors of Perry Common school. There are two other relevant schools in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest referred to them. They were the first two to opt out.

The payroll machinery for Great Barr school has been operated by the treasurer's department of Birmingham city council because it put in a bid to do the work; but let us get rid of the canard that the city council does not want anything to do with the schools that have opted out. The bid was accepted gladly by the head, who said that he was more than happy to accept it. As a result of a quirk in the law that applies to the provision of school meals, the school has been prevented from servicing the local junior school, which is on the same site. That is stupid. Now school meals are to be bussed in from another school miles away. That is absolutely barmy. In some ways I see it as a disservice to my constituents. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister can tell me that there will be an end to that nonsense, I shall certainly give way.

Mr. Eggar: Unfortunately, the Birmingham authority is one of only three or four Labour local authorities that have decided to provide services to grant-maintained schools. It is a very welcome decision. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and suggest that Newham adopt exactly the same policy as Birmingham.

Mr. Rooker: I am glad that I have got my point across. The local authority won the teachers' ballot. It is free to provide the services. I argue that every authority in this county could learn from Birmingham. I have made my point about the schools and about the actions of the city. The school to which I have referred is a large one, and opting out is a high-risk strategy when it is based on a vote of only 31 per cent. of parents. That worries me deeply.

11.25 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Some hon. Members have said that these regulations represent a bribe. I hope that they will prove to be an inducement. Consider the local authority forces—legitimate and less legitimate—that opting-out schools are up against. It seems that anything that can be done to smooth the path of the electorate towards choosing to opt out—having a fair choice, and having that choice implemented quickly—will be a good thing. The main feature of these regulations is that they will introduce clarity about a school's financial position, and will speed up the process of opting out. I hope that that in itself will act as an inducement to go along this very difficult path. We are talking about a David and Goliath syndrome.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) ventured on to extremely dangerous ground when he talked about electoral turnout. The education authority

for the constituency of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is Lancashire county council. At the last election, the turnout in the hon. Gentleman's constituency was 38·2 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Yes, the last council election. In this country, it is councils that run education policy. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Blackburn does not."] Lancashire does. I am making this point with reference to the constituency of the hon. Member for Perry Barr. The figure for that constituency was 38·2 per cent., and for Lancashire it was 40 per cent.

On the basis of such figures, county councils have enormous power. They dictate policy and they persecute individual opting-out schools.

Mr. Flannery: Come on.

Mr. Walden: The hon. Gentleman need not say, "Come on." We have been given many examples.

When the hon. Member for Perry Barr laments the 60 per cent. turnout in the vote in respect of his school, he should ask himself what kind of democracy we have in education at present. Very often, the turnout is below 50 per cent. In the case of Lancashire county council, it is 40 per cent. and in the case of Blackburn, 38·2 per cent. If we are to talk about democracy, let us get it right. At present, we have a totally undemocratic system of education administration, if only because the turnout in local elections is the lowest in Europe, whereas the power of local education bureaucracies is among the highest in Europe.

What the Opposition have given us tonight is totally disingenuous, whereas what the Government are giving us is common sense, good sense and principled sense. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), in his opening remarks, made a very interesting slip of the tongue. He said, "We are going to abolish the principle of opting out." Those were his words. People do not abolish principles; principles exist, and they remain, and the principle of choice will remain. Choice is not dogma; it is uniformity that is dogma, as we have seen in eastern Europe. I give the Opposition full marks for their consistency. They not only want to introduce uniformity in the organisation of our schools, and to abolish grant-maintained schools——

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [10 May].*

The House divided: Ayes 118, Noes 262.

Division No. 145] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Robert Wareing.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony

Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Kirklees (Housing Corporation Allocation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I am grateful to have this opportunity to raise a matter which I regard as thoroughly scandalous. The scandal is that my local council, Kirklees council, which is controlled by the Labour party, is wilfully depriving perhaps as many as 400 homeless people of the chance of being rehoused.

As a result of Kirklees council's non-co-operation with the housing association movement, the Housing Corporation has felt it necessary to withdraw some £4 million-worth of funding for housing associations within Kirklees this financial year. The council's decision to refuse to co-operate with the Housing Corporation can accurately be described only as spiteful and vindictive, based as it is on pure political dogma. The main losers are homeless people, the very people for whom the Labour party claims to care.

Let me give you some background information, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 1989, the Jephson housing association applied to the Housing Corporation for approved landlord status under the tenants' choice scheme in all the 15 local authority areas in which it operated, which included Kirklees. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know better than I, under the tenants' choice scheme local authority tenants can apply for a change of landlord, but such a transfer can take place only if the majority of the tenants have voted for it. Therefore, to apply to be an approved landlord by no means automatically results in the approved landlord taking over local authority housing stocks.

Jephson wrote to Kirklees council, promising that it would make no unsolicited approaches to council tenants. That meant that, so long as Kirklees council provided a proper and decent service to its tenants, Jephson was unlikely to take over any of its housing stock. In spite of that, Kirklees council took exception to Jephson's application to become an approved landlord and withdrew all co-operation from the housing association.

None of the 14 other local authorities in which Jephson operated objected to its application to become an approved landlord. Jephson is no fly-by-night landlord but a well-respected housing association within the housing association movement. Last spring, it commissioned a poll —carried out by Birmingham university and National Opinion Polling—among its tenants to find out what they thought of how it was managing the housing stock. The vast majority of those tenants gave a clean bill of health to the Jephson housing association.

Kirklees council objected on purely ideological grounds. The socialist council believes that only it should run public housing and to hell with the wishes of tenants and homeless people in Kirklees if their needs conflict with the ideological dogma of the socialists.

The dispute continues to this day, despite the fact that everything that Jephson did was above board, within the law and with the support of the Housing Corporation. The Housing Corporation has attempted to resolve the problem, but has now lost patience with Kirklees council. It believes in working closely with local authorities, but, because of its poor relationship with Kirklees council, the grant to housing associations within Kirklees is some £4 million less than it would otherwise have been. It is certainly £4 million below what the housing needs index shows that Kirklees should receive in this financial year. It is receiving £8 million as opposed to the £12 million shown on the index.

The gainers are other councils in West Yorkshire, notably Leeds, which are prepared to co-operate with the Housing Corporation. A couple of years ago, the regional director of the Housing Corporation, Mr. Clark, said that the corporation had met more problems with Kirklees than any other council in the region. He said:

> "Over the last four years Kirklees has lost £12m against the needs index"

for the district.

A local newspaper, the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner,* recently published a letter from a committee member of the West Yorkshire housing association, Mr. Coldwell, which also operates within Kirklees. He said that housing associations were in the business of providing housing at an affordable rate. He also said:

> "I consider Kirklees' record on working with our association lamentable, to say the least.
>
> Time and time again Kirklees' bureaucracy has delayed our progress in providing homes for the homeless . . . For good luck to the homeless in Leeds read bad luck to the homeless in Kirklees."

As Mr. Coldwell said in his letter, he is a member of the Labour party but is dismayed by the behaviour of Kirklees council in that matter.

I initiated this Adjournment debate to draw that thoroughly unsatisfactory situation to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister and to ask him to see whether he can resolve it. In some ways it seems a little surprising that the Housing Corporation is able to withhold grant from a particular area. However, there is no doubt that this fiasco can be laid fairly and squarely at the door of the socialist council for refusing to co-operate with the housing association movement.

We hear Labour councillors going on about the problems of homelessness and the fact that councillors are not allowed to build new housing. The position in Kirklees shows as clearly as anything could do why some local authorities cannot be trusted with the responsibility of providing for housing needs.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Kirklees federation of tenants associations was telling council tenants that if they chose another landlord, they would not be eligible for housing benefit as it was provided just because they lived in Kirklees houses? Is it not disgraceful that an authority such as Kirklees, which is always saying that it has no money and no housing—I hope that next week my hon. Friend the Minister will see the condition of some of that housing—could lose £4 million that is desperately needed for housing? If the authority got its act together and co-operated, that money could be available for homeless people.

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and entirely agree with her comments. On her first point, it is absolutely right that Kirklees tenants should have an organisation to represent their views. However, it is reprehensible if the Kirklees federation of tenants associations is spreading scare stories that tenants would not be eligible for housing benefit if the council's housing

[Mr. Riddick]

stock was transferred to a housing association. The federation has a responsibility to ensure that the information that it provides to its members is accurate.

My hon. Friend's second point was absolutely correct. So often we hear Labour councillors in Kirklees and elsewhere complaining about the problems of homelessness. However, Kirklees councillors are responsible for denying the creation of places for perhaps 400 homeless people this year, which is unforgivable. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can do something about that.

Perhaps Kirklees council should be known as the £4 million council, because it has lost Kirklees homeless people £4 million in Housing Corporation grants. It has failed to claim £4 million from the utility companies because it has not carried out the appropriate repairs to excavations in the roads. There are £4 million of rent arrears outstanding in Kirklees.

The irony is that, as far as I am aware, no local authority tenants have taken advantage of the tenants' choice scheme since it was created a couple of years ago. Do the Government have any plans to make the tenants' choice scheme more popular? Like many hon. Members, I find that complaints about council houses rank high among the issues raised in my constituency surgeries and mail, but no tenants have opted to take advantage of the tenants' choice scheme.

Perhaps that is because the procedures involved are complicated, or because the National Federation of Housing Associations has effectively said that its members will not get involved unless the local authority is happy with such a proposal. Perhaps asssurances relating to security of tenure, rent and so on are insufficiently strong. Perhaps it is because the Kirklees federation of tenants associations, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) referred, has been spreading misleading information. Perhaps it is simply because tenants are unaware of the opportunities provided by the tenants' choice scheme.

Whatever the reason for the lack of interest in the tenants' choice scheme, it would be well worth while the Government's looking at it again to see how it could be made more attractive to tenants. I am sure that it would be in the interests of some tenants to take advantage of the scheme, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would say what plans he has to promote the scheme. The scheme fits in perfectly with the Government's belief in empowering the consumers of public services, because it gives tenants the opportunity to decide how they wish their estates to be run.

However, despite the poor take-up of tenants' choice, there is clear evidence that the threat that tenants could choose alternative landlords has galvanised some local authorities into improving the quality of service provided to their tenants. That is a welcome development.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond positively so as to give hope to homeless people in Kirklees and the chance of greater choice to council house tenants.

11.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on gaining the opportunity of raising this important issue. My hon. Friend is a robust champion of the interests and rights of tenants in his constituency and of those who would like to become tenants there.

I fully support the firm stance that the Housing Corporation has taken in this case. It seems to me that Kirklees borough council has acted less than responsibly in its refusal to work either with a reputable housing association, such as Jephson, or with the Housing Corporation itself. My sympathy, like that of my hon. Friend lies with the council's tenants and with those people in Kirklees who are in housing need. Both have suffered as a consequence of the council's actions.

I was also shocked by the disclosures of my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) about the misleading scare stories being put about, and about the threat that housing benefit might not be available to tenants who make a particular choice. I very much look forward to my visit to that part of the world shortly, when I hope to see for myself the housing conditions there.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley has explained, the dispute arose because of a decision by the local authority to withdraw from negotiations for the disposal of land to the Jephson housing association. Why did the council withdraw its support? Simply because Jephson had applied to the Housing Corporation for approved landlord status under the tenants' choice legislation. I understand that the council made no formal objection to Jephson's application at the time. It chose instead to break off negotiations that would have led to the provision of new housing stock by the association. By its action, Kirklees was not only seeking to deprive its own tenants of their legal right to exercise tenants' choice, but was putting an obstacle in the way of the provision by Jephson of some much-needed new housing in the area.

As the House is aware, tenants' choice gives most public sector tenants the right to change their landlord without moving from their existing homes. Tenants consider tenants' choice for many reasons, but mostly because they are dissatisfied with the service that they receive and want to see it improved—surely a fundamental right of every tenant. The aim of the scheme is first and foremost a better service for tenants. This can certainly be achieved by a change of landlord.

Just as important, however, as my hon. Friend said, the mere possibility of that change, and therefore the prospect of competition, also has an impact on local authority performance. We know that tenants' choice has spurred many local authorities to look again at the services that they provide for their tenants. It has concentrated their minds wonderfully on reforming housing management and paying more attention to what their customers want. There is evidence, for example, that the spur of competition has been a real boost to tenant consultation and estate-based management. Local authorities are now, at last, keen to know what their tenants think. Attitude surveys, once conducted by 5 per cent. of authorities, have been conducted since 1988 by no fewer than 50 per cent. of them.

It is an important feature of the tenants' choice scheme that tenants should be able to transfer to a landlord of their choosing. Some tenants wish to explore setting up their own landlord organisation, but housing associations also are often considered. Their experience and expertise in the provision of social housing make them an obvious choice. Of the 23 landlords approved for tenants' choice so

far, 19 are registered housing associations, and we are encouraging more to participate by making grants available to help them take forward the costly transfer proceedings.

Many associations, however, are discouraged from becoming involved in tenants' choice because of the hostile attitude of local authorities such as Kirklees. Some authorities have threatened withdrawal of co-operation from housing associations which become involved in tenants' choice, but none except Kirklees has actually done so. My Department and the Housing Corporation take a very serious view of the action of Kirklees.

It is important for housing associations to have close working relationships with local authorities, but it is not acceptable for a local authority to seek to undermine the independence of the association and prevent tenants from exercising their statutory rights under tenants' choice. Why did Kirklees seek to do exactly that? I can only assume that Kirklees sought to oppose tenants' choice generally, and Jephson in particular, because it was afraid of the competition.

In tenants' choice, all potential new landlords must apply to the Housing Corporation for approval, as Jephson did, before any transfer application can be made. The corporation lays down stringent criteria concerning financial viability, experience of housing management and commitment to the provision of housing for those on low incomes. Potential landlords can apply for specific approval, relating to particular property or estates, or for general approval.

Jephson applied for general approval to enable it to be ready to pursue a tenants' choice transfer should tenants in the area wish it to do so. Jephson assured the council that it would not approach tenants, but would respond only to tenants who approached it and agreed not to proceed with a transfer in the face of reasonable opposition from the local authority nor to proceed unless a majority of tenants voting, voted in favour. That seems more reasonable. However, without any consultation with the Housing Corporation, Kirklees decided to deny support to the Jephson housing association, withdrawing from site sales that were then at an advanced stage and refusing to supply sites to the association in future.

The Housing Corporation asked the council to reconsider its action, but, I am sorry to say, to no avail. As a result, not only has the council refused to have dealings with the Jephson housing association, but it has effectively broken off relations with the Housing Corporation. Despite repeated attempts by the corporation's regional office to persuade the council to reconsider, there has been no formal council response to the corporation's requests since August 1989, when the corporation's regional director addressed the council's housing committee on the Jephson issue. A result of that, and of the poor performance of the council's programmes, is that Kirklees has received a lower allocation for Housing Association schemes funded by the corporation than might otherwise have been expected.

Although the Government are involved in decisions about the regional allocation of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, the distribution of resources within the regions is a matter for the corporation's own regional offices. At national level, distribution to the regions is made principally in accordance with the housing needs indicator, or HNI, an objective measurement of need, reviewed each year by the Government, the Housing Corporation and the National Federation of Housing Associations. For statistical reasons, however, the HNI is less reliable in assessing the incidence of need at a more local level, and considerable reliance is placed on the judgment and local knowledge of the corporation's regional offices.

In the north-east region, 50 per cent. of the resources are distributed according to the HNI scores of local authority areas, and 50 per cent. at the discretion of the regional offices. This mirrors the Government's own practice in distributing housing resources to local authorities, using the generalised needs index.

In order to improve the management of its capital programme, the north-east region, like the corporation's other regions, has been introducing a system of allocating resources to housing associations on the basis of three-year programmes for each local authority area. These are drawn up in discussion with housing associations and local authorities. The region is particularly keen to co-ordinate the use of its own resources with those of local authorities and others in order to maximise the impact of its programmes. Kirklees's refusal to have any contact with the corporation has meant that the corporation has been unable to prepare a three-year strategy for the area, in the way that it has been able to do with the other four local authorities in West Yorkshire. As a consequence, the corporation's allocation for housing association schemes in Kirklees this year, a total of £8·126 million for rented housing, is substantially below what the area might otherwise have received.

Regrettably, this is not a new occurrence. For some years, allocations to the Kirklees district have been lower than the corporation would have liked, reflecting a poor performance by the local authority in promoting and facilitating housing association schemes in its area. What is particularly unfortunate about the dispute that erupted in 1989 is that, in the preceding two years, the corporation had been working closely with officers of the council to improve the programme of activity by housing associations in the area. While other authorities had a clear view and strategy, it was not always apparent what Kirklees wanted housing associations to do in its area. This situation had begun to improve, even though there continued to be problems in getting schemes off the ground.

The reduced allocation does not mean that the corporation has turned a blind eye to the evidence of housing need in Kirklees. I should like to quote from the letter which the corporation's regional director wrote to the chief executive of Kirklees on 22 April, announcing this year's allocation. It says:

"The Housing Corporation is fully aware that the housing needs in Kirklees are some of the most severe in the region. We are still very anxious to see that our investment goes some way to alleviating the housing need and environmental problems of the district. The fact that we are unable to give a full allocation to the Authority is a source of great concern to us, as it must be to you. We would be very unhappy for this situation to continue for a further full year."

The director went on to stress the importance of re-opening the dialogue between the corporation and the officers and members of Kirklees. I believe that that letter makes it clear, as my hon. Friend said, that responsibility for the break down in dialogue lies firmly, clearly and solely with Kirklees council. For its part, the Housing Corporation has demonstrated its keenness to co-operate.

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

I urge Kirklees borough council to lift its ban on the Jephson housing association and to resume relations with the Housing Corporation. The corporation is now the main provider of new subsidised housing. In his autumn statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that its funding would be increased from £1·1 billion in 1990-91 to over £2 billion in 1993-94; in the current year it stands at £1·6 billion. Over the next three years, housing associations are expected to complete around 100,000 corporation-funded dwellings, and from next year onwards the corporation will be approving new projects at the rate of around 45,000 units a year.

Close liaison with the Housing Corporation is essential, if local authorities are to be able to fulfil their new enabling role. In the past, too many authorities have been content to remain the monopoly providers of low-cost housing for rent. Like most monopolies, that has worked against the interests of the customer. Too many authorities have in the past shown themselves to be insensitive to the needs of their tenants and inefficient in the management of their stock. The enabling role is more difficult and more challenging. Authorities must be thoroughly informed of the needs in their area, perhaps more so than in the past. They must maintain a close working relationship with other providers, including the Housing Corporation, housing associations and private developers. If they fulfil their role properly, the result will be more choice, more variety and a more efficient service to people in housing need.

It is not enough merely to demonstrate need. Local authorities must show themselves capable of co-operating with other agencies to find the best means of meeting that need. Otherwise, we should simply waste resources that could be put to better use elsewhere. We must not lose sight of the ultimate aim, which is to help those in housing need and improve the service already provided to those living in subsidised housing.

I urge the members of Kirklees council to consider the effects that their attitude is having not only on the council's tenants, but on those who would benefit from an agreed strategy for the provision of new housing association stock in the area. They should lift their ban on the Jephson housing association and reopen discussions with the Housing Corporation. No one is benefiting from the present state of affairs. As my hon. Friend has said clearly, many people are losing directly as a result of the obstinate attitude of the Kirklees borough council. A great deal could be cone if the council were more co-operative.

Finally, let me say how pleased I am to hear my hon. Friend speak so positively about the tenants' choice scheme. It is true that transfers under the scheme have been slow to make progress, and I share my hon. Friend's disappointment about that. The risk of antagonising local authorities, as the Kirklees case illustrates, is undoubtedly one of the factors making some housing associations wary of participating in the scheme. The procedures involved are long and complex, as they have to be to deal effectively with a transfer contested by a hostile local authority.

The time taken to achieve progress is, however, in some ways understandable. From the tenants' points of view, a decision to change to a new landlord is one not to be taken lightly, and tenants rightly need time to consider all the issues involved. The terms and conditions of their tenancies on transfer, for example, which can be broadly comparable with their existing secure tenancies, need to be carefully examined. But some 70 or so tenant groups up and down the country are talking to the Housing Corporation about the scheme, and some are now making good progress towards transfer. Four of them have reached formal application stage and I am hoping to see some transfers achieved in the reasonably near future.

In the meantime, as my hon. Friend has suggested, we have been considering ways of speeding up progress and encouraging greater participation. We have agreed with the Housing Corporation that grants should be available to registered housing associations to help with the costs of the transfer process, and that resources generally should be targeted on schemes that have real prospects of success. The Housing Corporation is, of course, continuing its work of publicising the scheme to ensure that all tenants are fully aware of the opportunities that tenants' choice offers. As I have said, the vital point about the scheme is that these opportunities exist and bring an element of real competition into local authority provision, which is the best guarantee of good housing management and services that tenants can have.

The tenants and the people of Colne Valley and of Batley and Spen are well served by the way in which my hon. Friends have raised this important subject and exposed the deplorable attitude of the Labour council in Kirklees. I hope that their arguments and my remarks in reply will be properly noted by tenants, prospective tenants and by all the voters in those constituencies, and that they will see who is championing their interests and who is doing the opposite.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Wednesday 22 May.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Monday 20 May at Seven o'clock.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 May], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate further adjourned till Wednesday 22 May.

Mr. Speaker: As the next four Bills have blocking motions, I shall put them together.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Wednesday 22 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufacturing Exports

1. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on the current level of United Kingdom manufacturing industry exports.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): In the latest quarter, manufactured export volumes—excluding erratics—were 3 per cent. up on a year earlier, compared with a fall in imports of 4 per cent.

Mr. Hunter: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that during the past two years, the United Kingdom's share of the world trade in manufactures has increased, that United Kingdom manufacturing exports have increased by 18 per cent. and that this year investment in United Kingdom manufacturing industry is expected to increase by 60 per cent. over the 1981 figure? Does not that make a mockery of Opposition attempts to spread doom and gloom?

Mr. Mellor: A number of manufacturing industries are certainly going through a difficult time at present, and nothing that I say is intended to diminish that fact. As the main answer to the question and some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) show, manufacturing industry is well capable of bouncing back from this recession and there are all manner of good statistics to be drawn from our performance. When points are made about investment, the extent to which investment increased in the late 1980s should be borne in mind.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Chief Secretary acknowledge that export-led manufacturing industry plays an important part in this country's employment base? The Chief Secretary and his fellow Ministers were quick enough to claim the credit when they thought that unemployment was coming down. Now that we are in the 13th month in which the unemployment figures have risen, rather than fallen, will the Chief Secretary, on behalf of the Government's Treasury team, come to the Dispatch Box and take his share of the blame?

Mr. Mellor: It is true that manufacturing export performance is important in this country. That is why, despite the Labour party's perennial endeavour to talk down British industry and important parts of it, it is worth while saluting our manufacturing performance. Manufacturing exports have done well in recent years. In the British car industry, figures for the first quarter of this year show a 40 per cent. increase in exports compared with a year earlier. That is impressive and shows the underlying strength of British manufacturing.

Income Tax

2. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the basic and highest rates of income tax in 1978-79; and what are the equivalent rates in the current tax year.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): The basic and highest rates of income tax on income in 1978-79 were 33 per cent. and 98 per cent. respectively. The equivalent current rates are 25 per cent. and 40 per cent.

Mr. Shaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, since they have been in office, the Government have consistently kept their promises to reduce the rates of income tax? Will he confirm that all past Labour Governments have increased income tax rates? Will he further confirm that under the last Labour Government, the brain drain reached record levels, with management figures going abroad because they were too highly taxed in this country?

Mr. Maude: I can certainly confirm that we have consistently and steadily brought down income tax rates and we propose to continue doing so. My hon. Friend was not quite right about the record of past Labour Governments. In fairness to the Labour party, I should say that the Attlee Government briefly reduced the basic rates of income tax before putting them up again, and the Ramsey MacDonald Government of 1924, during its nine months in office, failed to put up basic tax rates. But with those exceptions, Labour Governments throughout history have always raised income tax.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Financial Secretary agree that the combination of the tax system and the benefit system means that low-income families are being taxed by a combination of tax and benefit withdrawal at a rate of more than 90 per cent.? Does he agree that, in the new classless society that has been created, we have incentives for the rich, but not for the poor?

Mr. Maude: Absolutely not. The intention behind the tax reforms that we have introduced was to take out of tax 2 million people who would have paid tax if the regime left by the Labour Government had remained in force. Two million people who would have paid tax under a Labour Government do not pay any tax at all. The benefit reforms that we have introduced were specifically designed to reduce the high marginal rate of the combination of tax and withdrawal of benefit to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is better now than it was under the regime left by the Labour Government.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend believe that enough people have understood the point made by the Labour party that it intends to introduce a savings penalty of 9 per cent. on all savings income of more than £3,000? Would not that reduce the funds to building societies and cut the chances of people borrowing money to own their own homes?

Mr. Maude: I find it difficult to understand how the Labour party can in one breath proclaim the merits of saving and investment and say that it proposes to increase the tax on savings. We believe that it is right that people should save. It is good for individuals and for families because it makes them more independent and less dependent on the state and it increases the funds available for investment. That is important. It will be interesting to hear how the Labour Front Benchers square that with their proposal to increase the tax on savings, or does Labour simply not care?

Mrs. Beckett *rose*——

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mrs. Beckett: I am not allowed to answer at Question Time, at least not until we sit on the Government Benches.

Having given the figures for income tax in 1979 and the present year, will the Financial Secretary now give the figures for national insurance contribution rates in 1979 and the present year, for value added tax rates in 1979 and the present year and for the overall tax burden in 1979 and the present year, which include both those figures as well as the cuts in income tax?

Mr. Maude: As I understand the rules of the House, if the hon. Lady wishes to table a question to me about these fascinating and important matters, I shall provide her with a detailed and specific answer. However, as this question is about something completely different, I shall decline to do so. The hon. Lady mentioned the overall tax burden now compared with—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) asked a question about the tax burden and I shall provide an answer. If Labour Front Benchers would quieten down, they would have an opportunity to hear it.

It is right to say that the tax burden in 1980-81 increased substantially compared to that in 1978-79. It was necessary to raise taxes to pay off the enormous burden of debt levied on the country by the Labour Government —the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was a member of the Cabinet. The Labour Government reduced the tax burden, but they did so at the expense of increasing the tax burden on future generations. That is not a responsible way to proceed. Since 1980-81 the total tax burden has steadily fallen and it continues to do so.

Inflation

3. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which index of inflation he treats as the most reliable; and whether he has any plans for a new index.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I pay close attention to a range of indicators of inflation. I am currently considering the recommendation of the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service for a new index of consumer prices comparable with that of our European Community partners.

Mr. Beith: When the retail prices index is published tomorrow, will the Chancellor draw attention to the advice of the present Prime Minister, given a year ago, that the RPI is an inaccurate measure of underlying inflation? Is it true that the Bank of England has developed a new index of contemporary inflation which suggest that underlying inflation is remaining stubbornly high and may be influencing the Governor's current advice to the Government?

Mr. Lamont: On the first point, the RPI could hardly measure underlying inflation as it is a measure of headline inflation. It is the measure which matters to wage bargainers and to consumers, so it is good news for the country that it is coming down. It matters to pensioners, it matters to savers and it matters to British industry. All that the hon. Gentleman does is sit and nit-pick. We have said consistently that when looking at inflationary pressures we look at the underlying rate. The underlying

rate, excluding mortgage interest payments, has come down by 1 per cent. in the past six months. We are winning the battle against inflation and we shall go on winning it.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Surely the headline rate is what matters most to people with mortgages and community charge bills to pay. Is not the underlying rate likely to take a little longer to drop because of high wage settlements last autumn? Is not it likely to come down anyway later in the year if current policies are maintained?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. Obviously, the underlying rate comes down less quickly than the headline rate. The underlying rate did not go up nearly as much as the headline rate did, so there is no great issue to be made out of that. My hon. Friend is also right about earnings in manufacturing industry. It is extremely good news that, in the past two months, the rate of increase in earnings in manufacturing industry has gone down by 1 per cent. That shows that people are adjusting to inflation coming down.

Interest Rates

4. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what United Kingdom bank base rates were in June 1983 and June 1987; and what they are now.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Bank base rates were reduced to 9½ per cent. from 10 per cent. on 15 June 1983 and stood at 9 per cent. throughout June 1987. They now stand at 12 per cent.

Mr. Corbett: I thank the Chancellor for that reply. Why does he keep insisting that Government economic policies are working when almost 3 million of our fellow citizens are not? Does he see any connection between the loss of 1,000 manufacturing jobs each day for the first 90 working days of this year and high interest rates? Will he acknowledge that electors were looking forward to a June election because it is only during election periods that the Government manage to get interest rates down?

Mr. Lamont: Rising unemployment and the recession have been the price that we have had to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, under the previous Labour Government, inflation was never lower than 7·4 per cent. We shall have an average rate of inflation for the whole of this year lower than that.

Mr. Tim Smith: Contrary to the pessimistic forecasts of the anarcho-monetarists who wrote a letter to *The Times* a couple of months ago, is not it clear that Britain's membership of the exchange rate mechanism has been a great success, that it has led to exchange rate stability and lower interest rates and that there is every prospect that those will continue?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. Only a few months ago, when we joined the exchange rate mechanism, people said that our only choice was to devalue and leave the ERM or we would be unable to cut interest rates. In fact, we have been able to cut interest rates by 3 per cent. That has been good news for business and it has also been extremely good news for mortgage holders. Since last October, the average mortgage payment has come down from £290 to £240 per month, saving the average mortgage payer £50 a month. First-time buyers are doing even better because of competition between the building societies.

Dr. Marek: Will the Chancellor confirm and afterwards perhaps explain why interest rates were 12 per cent. or more for 60 months between 1979 and 1991 whereas, starting with the Attlee Government in 1945 all the way through until 1979, they were higher than 12 per cent. for only 26 months? Under the Conservative Administration of the past 12 years, interest rates seemed to be lower than 12 per cent. only in 1983, in 1987 and now in 1991. Are not the temporary low interest rates a politically expedient, but economically inadvisable blip? As soon as the Government win the next election—they hope—they will raise interest rates again.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is always telling us not to go back and make comparisons with the Labour Government, but now he seems to want us to go back all the way to the second world war, to a period when there was exchange control and control of bank lending. Interest rates all over the world were higher in the 1980s than they were in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s or 1970s. That has not prevented Britain's economy from growing more rapidly in the 1980s than before, despite the fact that we have had relatively high interest rates.

Corporation Tax

5. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the corporation tax rates and thresholds for small businesses; and what were the equivalent figures for 1979.

Mr. Maude: The small companies rate of corporation tax is 25 per cent. compared with 42 per cent. at the time of the 1979 general election. The profits limit for the small companies rate will be raised this year to £250,000, compared with £50,000 in 1979, and the threshold for marginal relief will be £1,250,000, compared with £85,000 in 1979.

Mr. Gill: As one who vividly remembers the difficulties and frustrations of running a business under the last Labour Administration, may I say how much I welcome my hon. Friend's reply? The relative improvement since 1979 is substantial and welcome, but will my hon. Friend never lose sight of the fact that substantial additional benefits can be gained by continuing to reduce the rates of tax in the corporate sector?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend puts a powerful case. It is worth pointing out that, at 33 per cent., the main rate of corporation tax for the coming year is now lower than the small companies rate was under Labour, and that is a huge benefit for small and large companies alike. We now have a corporation tax regime which is more generous and lower than that in any other country in the EC or in the Group of Seven. That puts the United Kingdom in an advantageous position which we shall seek to maintain and enhance. The House is waiting for some answers to the questions that we put to the Labour party about its proposal for new capital allowances. We want to know how much that would cost and whether the Labour party would increase the rate of corporation tax to pay for it.

Ms. Short: Labour Members of Parliament in Birmingham recently met the West Midlands Employers Federation. The situation there is desperate and worrying for manufacturing firms which are trying to invest and survive. The Minister should not mislead the House about its seriousness. Manufacturers badly want to be able to

offset corporation tax against investment, which will result in higher investment in our country. Will the hon. Gentleman consider that?

Mr. Maude: I am a west midlands Member myself and I am aware of the difficulties that some businesses are experiencing in the west midlands, as elsewhere. I am also aware of the news from the car industry. Production of cars in the west midlands, as elsewhere, has increased this year. The number of cars produced for export has more than doubled and overall production has increased compared with last year. Exports have increased by 40 per cent. with the British car industry now exporting two thirds as many cars as are imported, compared with one third only a year or two ago. That is good news. It would be nice to hear the hon. Lady giving the credit that is due to the managers and work force in the British car industry who, in the past decade, have transformed the way in which the industry performs. It is now a powerful and good industry, not the joke that it used to be.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

6. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated public sector borrowing requirement for this financial year; and what are the comparable figures for the United States of America and the average of all European Community countries.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest forecast is a public sector borrowing requirement of £7·9 billion, around 1¼ per cent. of GDP. Substantially larger fiscal deficits are expected in the United States and on average among European Community countries.

Mr. Fishburn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that of the seven largest industrial countries, only Japan has a stronger fiscal position than Britain? Will he further confirm that to borrow 1 per cent. of GNP after some years of healthy surplus is altogether different from borrowing 6 per cent., as happened year after year under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. The fact that we have run a strong fiscal position has meant that we have been able to spend money on priority programmes. As my hon. Friend said, under the last Labour Government, the PSBR averaged 6¾ per cent. of GDP. That is equivalent today to £40 billion. We have repaid debt of some £27 billion, enabling us to save £3 billion a year for the taxpayer—the equivalent of 50 new hospitals a year or 10 per cent. more on health care. The fastest growing part of the Labour party's public expenditure programme would be debt interest.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Recognising the linkage between the public sector borrowing requirement and interest rates, why was it that in 1983 and in 1987, which were both election years, interest rates were at the bottom of the trough? Does the Chancellor intend to orchestrate another cut in interest rates, against the advice of the Governor of the Bank of England? If the right hon. Gentleman opposes that action, what does he intend to do?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is factually incorrect. The trough in interest rates occurred in 1988, not 1987. The hon. Gentleman ought to check his facts. There is no disagreement between the Governor of the Bank of England and myself over interest rate policy. Our position is that interest rates will be maintained in order to safeguard our position in the exchange rate mechanism, and we will have the flexibility to reduce interest rates as and when inflation comes down.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that of all the unreliable statistics on which the Treasury has to pontificate, the public sector borrowing requirement is the most unreliable of all—as events have proved so many times in the past? It is always a mistake to base too much of the Government's economic policy on the current PSBR figure.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the PSBR is the difference between two very big magnitudes, and therefore is subject to enormous swings. However, our interest rate policy is not based on the PSBR. I think that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), was making the point that the PSBR has a consequential effect on interest rates.

Manufacturing Trade

7. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what year was manufacturing trade last in surplus.

Mr. Mellor: In 1982.

Mr. Skinner: Is not the truth of the matter that Britain enjoyed a manufacturing trade surplus every year since the industrial revolution, until this mob came into government, and finished up with a deficit in 1982? We had a trade surplus when we had the spinning-jenny and when we invented the steam engine, but now, under this gang of spivs, we have a plastic economy—and the wheels have dropped off.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the typically understated way in which he asked his question, and for auditioning for the job of conducting the proms at the same time. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the manufacturing deficit turns on the increase in exports and in imports. As it happens, during the period that we moved into deficit, the increase in exports year-on-year was running at 7½ per cent. between 1983 and 1990. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to have the comparative figure under Labour between 1974 and 1979, when manufacturing exports achieved a year-on-year increase of 2 per cent. The increased prosperity of the 1980s of course brought increased demand for imported goods.

Mr. Devlin: Has my right hon. and learned Friend had an opportunity to study reports on manufacturing industry in the north of England? They show that it is holding up very well in the northern region and that small firms are doing better than large companies in the present recession. Is not that a credit to the Government, who have pursued a policy of broadening employment from the large manufacturing industries, such as shipbuilding and steel, across a wider variety of small businesses employing people in many different types of work?

Mr. Mellor: What my hon. Friend has said is true not only of the northern region but of south Wales and Scotland, where a much more diversified manufacturing economy now exists than ever before. Most notably, this

shows the confidence of overseas investors in the United Kingdom and in those regions. The number of Japanese companies now investing in the north is especially noteworthy.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Chief Secretary not appreciate that, as well as the figures that show fast-rising unemployment, we have today seen figures released by the Central Statistical Office that reveal that investment has plummeted by 20 per cent. in the past year? Is that not the most awful way to prepare for the operation of the single market after 1992? What do the Government intend to do about that fall in investment?

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman fails to disclose that any fall in investment represents a fall from the dramatically higher level—indeed, the historically high level—of the past few years. The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head, but I gave him the figures yesterday. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to want to ask questions and then to intervene from a sedentary position, but I shall give him the figures anyway.

Total business investment in 1978 amounted to £35·8 billion at 1985 prices. By 1988 the figure had risen to £52 billion, in 1989 it had reached £56 billion, and in 1990 it stood at £55 billion. To criticise the Government for a fall from historically high levels is not to go to the root of the matter.

Of course we regret any reduction in investment, even when it represents a fall from very high levels, but, given the performance of manufacturing industry in the export market, even during the current recession, I am confident that investment will soon bounce back to the levels that we achieved in the late 1980s.

8. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the latest trend in the balance of trade for manufactured goods.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The deficit on United Kingdom trade in manufactures has fallen sharply. In the first quarter of 1991 the deficit was £1·3 billion—less than 1 per cent. of GDP and the lowest for over five years.

Mr. Irvine: Can my hon. Friend confirm that that encouraging trend in the balance of trade in manufactured goods is reflected not only in a fall in imports, but in an increase in exports? Does she agree that that in turn reflects great credit on the competitive performance of our manufacturing exporters in world markets?

Mrs. Shephard: I certainly agree. In 1990, the United Kingdom volume share of world trade in manufactures rose for the second successive year. Mention has already been made of the splendid performance of the car industry; in the latest quarter, the volume of exports was up 40 per cent. on the previous year. My hon. Friend is absolutely right—and exports are due to increase.

Mr. John Garrett: Is the Minister aware that the Governor of the Bank of England described our recession as home grown? Given the massive reductions in export services, in assistance for innovation, and in training, how does the Minister expect us to regain our place in world manufacturing?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman has slightly misquoted the Governor of the Bank of England, who qualified that observation.

Employee Share Ownership

9. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry concerning recent Budget measures to encourage wider employee share ownership.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend and I meet the CBI frequently. The CBI has given warm support to our Budget proposals on employee share ownership.

Mr. Taylor: Will my hon. Friend note that management is now increasingly on our side, encouraging employee share schemes and, in particular, welcoming the Budget proposals for schemes which given an incentive to all employees to participate, rather than retaining the old executive share basis? Will my hon. Friend join me in hoping that more trade unions will welcome that development, which can be shown to be in the interests of all employees and should therefore be in the interests of the unions as well?

Mr. Maude: There has certainly been a good response to the various measures introduced by the Government over a period of years to encourage employee share ownership. A total of 2¼ million employees have now benefited from all-employee schemes. In addition, the number of employees in profit-related pay schemes has increased by no less than 50 per cent. in the past year.

That strikes us as the right way to approach participation by employees in the firms in which they work —in stark contrast with Labour's approach, which seems to be to hand the boardroom keys to the trade union bosses who are Labour's paymasters.

Mr. William Ross: Given that one of the ways in which employee participation and ownership was increased was through the sale of nationalised industries, will the Minister give an assurance to the House that the employees of Northern Ireland Electricity and the citizens of Northern Ireland will have an opportunity to bid for and own shares in Northern Ireland Electricity when it is sold off?

Mr. Maude: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but it is inconceivable that he would propose arrangements which would do anything other than what the hon. Gentleman suggests. It is of great importance that when nationalised industries are privatised we encourage the employees of firms to participate by direct ownership in those companies and that the local population and customers of the industry or service also become owners. That seems to us to be desirable.

Mr. Butcher: When my hon. Friend next meets the Confederation of British Industry, will he discuss its suggestion that compensation for house owners and owners of other properties affected by planning applications should be at the rate of 125 per cent. of market value? If such an increase causes an improvement in the rate at which approvals are considered, it would save an awful lot of money.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about share ownership.

Mr. Butcher: I was referring to the CBI and its agenda for discussions with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Maude: Whether my hon. Friend's question is in order or not, it is a great delight to all of us to see him back in the House in good health and reinvigorated to take part in our deliberations and to take a characteristically forthright and splendid role in our debates.

We discuss a range of matters with the CBI, although the matter to which my hon. Friend referred is not, I confess, one that I have discussed with the CBI myself. However, I look forward to doing so in the near future.

Fixed Investment

10. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which of the last 10 calendar years total fixed investment fell by more than 9·75 per cent.

Mr. Mellor: None. Total fixed investment in 1990 at constant prices was higher than in any year other than the past three.

Mr. McAvoy: In an earlier answer the Minister confirmed that the level of manufactured investment had fallen by 20 per cent. in the past year. Will he also confirm that the level of manufacturing investment as a proportion of fixed investment is now lower than when the Government took office? For the sake of British industry, why does not the Treasury Bench resign and let Labour do the job?

Mr. Mellor: The key statistic is total investment in business in this country, which has shown a dramatic increase. I have given the figures. The House might be interested to know that in the 1980s total investment growth was higher in the United Kingdom than in any other country in the Group of Seven, bar one. Needless to say, between 1970 and 1980 Britain was at the bottom of that investment growth league.

Mr. Butterfill: Is it not true that our growth during the three-year period to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred was 43 per cent., which was faster than in Germany, France or Italy?

Mr. Mellor: Indeed, it was. The changes that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made in 1984 in corporation tax rates, and other benefits which resulted from the Government's policies, led to an unprecedented explosion in business investment. It is inevitable that if industrial development slows, the level of investment cannot be sustained every year. However, it is clear that even this year the investment rate will be well above that which prevailed for business generally in the 1970s in real terms. That is the key statistic.

Mrs. Fyfe: Looking to 1991 and beyond, does the Minister accept that the International Monetary Fund report predicts a fall in investment for 1991 and that the Confederation of British Industry is even more pessimistic in its forecasts? Is it not true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) said, that that bunch on the other side of the House ought to resign? Indeed, many people with considerably less important failures to record have shot themselves in despair.

Mr. Mellor: It is astonishing that Labour Members think that they are on to a good point about investment when the only way they can jeer at the Government's achievements is to compare this 12 months with the record levels established under the Government in the late 1980s. On the question of business investment, any comparison with Labour years will make only too clear how much of an advance there has been since then. In the 1970s, business investment in this country was stagnant. That is the key point which everyone should bear in mind.

Interest Rates

11. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when interest rates were last at 10 per cent.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Bank base rates last stood at 10 per cent. in July 1988.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he tell mortgage payers and businesses, in language that they can understand, why interest rates are not 2 per cent. lower? Is he aware that every time he reduces interest rates the banks put them up by 0·5 per cent. or 1 per cent. so that businesses are not at present benefiting from his policy on interest rates? Is he running the economy, or is it being run by the Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Lamont: On the first point, it is not true that the benefits of the reductions in interest rates have not come through to mortgage payers. As I explained earlier, the result of the 3 per cent. drop in interest rates since last October has been a payments reduction of about £50 per month for the average mortgage payer. That is a very dramatic improvement in take-home pay. Furthermore, as a result of competition between the banks and the building societies, the first-time buyer has seen an even bigger decrease. The market is working, and it is following interest rates down.

Mr. Wigley: If the inflation rate is coming down as rapidly as the Government believe, if sterling is so strong against the deutschmark and if consumer demand and manufacturing investment are low, surely the time has come to reduce the base rates further in order to stimulate the economy.

Mr Lamont: I do not believe that it would be right to reduce interest rates in order to stimulate the economy, as the hon. Gentleman puts it. Interest rates should, indeed, bear a relationship to inflation.

CBI

12. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received recently from the CBI about business expectations.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am in regular contact with the CBI. The latest CBI quarterly industrial survey shows a marked improvement in the trend of forward-looking indicators for business optimism, orders and output.

Mr. Squire: Did my right hon. Friend notice two particularly salient points in that survey—first, that the number of firms expecting higher unit costs was the lowest

for three years and, secondly, that the overall level of business optimism was the highest for a year? Do not he and the country expect from the merchants of doom and gloom on the Opposition Benches some recognition of this improvement?

Mr. Lamont: The Opposition seem to have a vested interest in failure and seem to want bad developments. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Another point that he might have mentioned is that the CBI survey also shows that the number of firms expecting to increase prices is very low. As my hon. Friend says, the CBI survey has a good track record as a forward indicator of growth in the economy. Everything in the surveys is consistent with my Budget forecast that the recovery will begin in the second half of the year.

Mr. Boateng: Putting aside the merchants of gloom and doom, does the Chancellor of the Exchequer agree with the remark of the chairman of Marks and Spencer that business is in for a "longish, hardish, roughish time"? If the Chancellor does not agree with that, let him answer this question: who knows more about running a business in these times—the chairman of Marks and Spencer or himself?

Mr. Lamont: I am sure that the chairman of Marks and Spencer knows much more about running Marks and Spencer—that is his job. I have always said that business is difficult and tough at the moment. But, equally, I have said—and I have given my reasons for this belief—that business will turn up in the second half of the year. All the indications are there. Surveys by the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, as well as the 3i's survey of business, including small businesses, all indicate that the business climate is slowly but definitely improving.

Inflation

13. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest year-on-year rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: All-items RPI inflation was 8·2 per cent. in March. It is expected to fall sharply over the coming months to 4 per cent. in the fourth quarter of 1991.

Mr. Burns: In welcoming the improving inflation figures, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to confirm that inflation is on target to reach 4 per cent. in the fourth quarter of this year? Does he agree that it ill behoves certain individuals constantly to talk down the improving inflation figures, given that between 1974 and 1979 inflation increased by more than 100 per cent. and that the best year-on-year rate of inflation in that period was only 7·4 per cent.?

Mr. Mellor: It is certainly true that during those years average inflation was 15½ per cent. Indeed, the lowest point that inflation reached in those years is equivalent to the average that it has been during 12 years under us. I confirm, as I did in my original answer, that we are on course for a 4 per cent. level at the end of the year.

Mr. Douglas: How does the Minister explain, apart from the statistical measures of inflation, the traditional view that inflation is a measure whereby the claims on resources in terms of money exceed those resources in real terms? Therefore, how does he explain that the resources that we have available to call into use, in terms of labour and capital, are under-utilised? How does he propose to alter that situation?

Mr. Mellor: I find that an utterly inexplicable question. I shall read the record and write to the hon. Gentleman.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does the Prime Minister agree that today's unemployment figures prove conclusively that the Conservative party has one economic policy only—that of mass unemployment? Is it true that the Government intend to introduce some form of compulsory work scheme to reduce the numbers of jobless people in this country, or will he be following the example of his predecessor by adding to the 30 or so fiddles in the calculation of the number of unemployed? Or will he—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is taking a great deal of time from his colleagues.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Or will the Prime Minister do what is in the best interests of his country, by resigning and making way for a Labour Government with a genuine strategy on jobs and industry?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is being both silly and graceless. I am as concerned about unemployment as the hon. Gentleman is, and it is precisely for that reason that I propose to continue with the policies to get inflation down, to ensure that there is a stable basis for the creation of jobs. There are a million extra jobs today than there were when the Conservative Government came to power and, in so far as making way for a Labour Government is concerned, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has said, because of Labour policy on the minimum wage people will lose their jobs.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that it is not part of his policy to increase taxation on earnings, unlike the Leader of the Opposition who proposes to increase tax on earnings for one in 15 people, the shadow Chancellor who intends to increase it for one in eight, or the people who are really master-minding the hidden Labour party agenda, who intend to increase taxes for everyone who earns?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is certainly correct that Labour Members seem to be in something of a muddle over their tax and spending figures. As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—who, alas, is not here at the moment—has said:

"Yes, of course, in an ideal world we would like to do what the Liberal Democrats are saying and say yes, we'd increase taxation."

That is their official policy.

Mr. Kinnock: If, as the Prime Minister claimed last Friday, his economic policies are working, why are 2,175,000 people in our country not working?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that the intention—and it is beginning to show clear signs of success—is to reduce inflation so that we may begin, yet again, to add to the 1 million jobs that we have created during the period of this Conservative Government. There is only one stable and sure way to create jobs and keep them—to keep inflation low, a policy which we shall pursue and he never could.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister seems to forget that today's unemployment figures show the highest April rise in unemployment since the war, that since he has been Prime Minister 3,000 people have lost their jobs every working day, that output is down and that investment has plummeted by 20 per cent. over the year. When the Prime Minister's policies are responsible for causing that huge damage, and when he has no answers and no policies to get out of it, is it not time that he went?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is genuinely concerned about unemployment, he should not advocate policies that will artifically increase it, such as the minimum wage. The Institute of Fiscal Studies said of his minimum wage policy:

"If the point is to avoid people being poor this is an extraordinarily stupid way of doing it."

If he does not like the IFS, perhaps Mr. Joe Haines of the *Daily Mirror* is more to his taste. He said:

"The minimum wage proposals won't work and if they do, won't help."

Sir Gerard Vaughan: Will my right hon. Friend visit, in the near future, a hospital that has opted out? Does he agree that yesterday Lord McColl explained clearly the benefits to patients when a hospital opts out—putting patients before bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will also explain to people in the vicinity that when a hospital opts out, it opts out of bureaucracy and not out of the national health service—contrary to the dishonest literature passed around by the Labour candidate for Monmouth, which the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) should repudiate.

Q2. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAvoy *rose——[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us settle down.

Mr. McAvoy: Conservative Members seem very nervous. In 1979, the Tories promised that, if elected, they would not double VAT, but once elected they increased it from 8 to 15 per cent. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister failed to answer a question on future levels of VAT. Can this simple and honest Prime Minister give a simple and honest answer to the question? If the Tories are re-elected, will they further increase VAT?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman graciously concedes that we shall be in a position to decide that at the next general election, but I want no lectures on value added tax from the party which put tax on children's sweets, even though its leader did not know it.

Mr. Stevens *rose——[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down.

Mr. Stevens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the right way to raise the status of teachers is by giving them a pay review body, rather than reducing their take-home pay by increasing their tax?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Our purpose in introducing a review body was to raise the status of teachers, and I believe that teachers across the country will accept that. The Opposition's policy, on the other hand, is entirely clear—to take away parental choice and, as the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has admitted, to increase taxation on a large number of teachers.

Q3. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Salmond: Has the Prime Minister heard of the great gas robbery? Is he aware that, last week, the Government gave permission for the development of up to 12 North sea fields to take gas from off the coast of Aberdeen straight to the north-east of England to generate cheap electricity, and that that will be done with public support through offsets against petroleum revenue tax? Why, under the right hon. Gentleman's Administration, is Scotland set to become the first country in history to pay international oil companies to take away its most valuable natural resource?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might make some acknowledgement of the tremendous asset to Scotland that investment there has been—not least by the oil and gas industries.

German Chancellor

Q4. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will next meet the Chancellor of Germany; and what subjects he intends to discuss with him.

The Prime Minister: I expect to see the Chancellor next at the European Council in Luxembourg on 28 and 29 June, when we shall discuss whatever business is before the Council.

Mr. Hunter: In the course of his continuing dialogue with Chancellor Kohl, has my right hon. Friend found grounds to believe that effective common European foreign, defence and security policies are attainable, or have the events of a few months ago demonstrated that, at least for the time being, they are unattainable?

The Prime Minister: What is entirely clear is that, whatever may be decided, NATO must remain the core of our defence for the future, and that includes beyond any doubt the continued presence in Europe of United States and Canadian forces. But I think that there is scope for improving the co-operation of European views within

NATO and the effectiveness of the European response outside the NATO area. We have put forward detailed proposals for both in the intergovernmental conferences.

Mr. Wareing: As it is believed that Herr Karl Otto Poehl is about to offer his resignation as president of the Bundesbank, will the Prime Minister be telling the German Chancellor that he is about to offer a free transfer to Mr. Leigh-Pemberton, the Governor of the Bank of England, and offer him to the German Chancellor free of charge?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir.

Mr. Ian Taylor: When my right hon. Friend meets the German Chancellor, will he discuss the implications of the recent European Commission decision to intervene in German industry to remove the subsidies that the west German Government have been paying to west German industry for some years? And is not that a sign that the Single European Act and the single market are working very effectively and levelling the playing field for the benefit of Britain?

The Prime Minister: I hope and believe that that is the case. We certainly wish to see the continued reduction of subsidies throughout Europe.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Prime Minister agree or disagree with the chief executive of Alderhey hospital, who has told the district health authorities that any district health authority paying an additional £7,500 will be guaranteed not to wait more than 12 months for surgery to be performed on children sent to that hospital? Is not that a clear indication that the Government have completely abandoned the national health service principle of treatment when it is needed and also any pretence of providing other than a two-tier service that will deprive children of surgery at the time when they need it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is being very cheap and wholly inaccurate. There is no question of a two-tier health service. The hon. Gentleman may find what was said recently by a doctor on "Newsnight" interesting. He said:

"I don't accept that there'll be any priority given"—

[Interruption.] I know that right hon. and hon. Members do not like listening to alternative views, but it would do them good to do so occasionally. The doctor said:

"I don't accept that there'll be any priority given in where the patients are treated at all. My enthusiasm for GP fund-holding is based on"——

[Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman should listen. The doctor said:

"My enthusiasm . . . is based on the belief that because I know my patients and because I know the resources in the health service and because I care about the patients, I'm in the best position to use the resources in a wise and helpful way".

That is the view of people treating patients, and it is better than the hon. Gentleman's.

Mr. Burt: Bearing in mind the adverse criticism directed so often in the past against English football supporters, does my right hon. Friend share my pleasure not only in Manchester United's excellent result last night against Barcelona but in the behaviour of its supporters? Does he agree with me that, good though the quality of the play was, it is likely to be bettered on Sunday in the third division play-off by Bury football club against Bolton Wanderers?

The Prime Minister: I think that I should be in very considerable danger if I answered the last part of that question. With regard to the first part, however, I am glad to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Manchester United, and not only on the performance of its team——

Mr. Kinnock: "Up the Reds!"

The Prime Minister: Well, on some occasions, maybe. I congratulate Manchester United not only on the performance of its team but on the behaviour of its supporters, which gave an excellent example in Europe that I look forward to seeing followed by British teams throughout Europe when they lift, I hope, a number of trophies next year.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week, please?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 20 MAY—Debate on "Next Steps" in the civil service on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion to take note of EC Document No. 4936/91 relating to the European energy charter. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 21 MAY—Until about seven o'clock consideration of Lords amendments to the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill, followed by:

Motion on the Charge Limitation (England) (Maximum Amount) Order.

WEDNESDAY 22 MAY—Remaining stages of the New Roads and Street Works Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on Members' resettlement grant.

THURSDAY 23 MAY—Debates on the Adjournment.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet to consider European Community documents as follows:

Wednesday 22 May at 10.30 am

Committee A—Document Nos. 8149/88, 9204/89, 5807/90 and 4684/91 relating to natural habitats; and

Committee B—Document No. 10146/90 relating to labelling of tobacco products.

[Monday 20 May:

Floor of the House

Relevant European Community document

4936/91 European Energy Charter

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee

HC 29-xvi (1990-91)

Wednesday 22 May:

European Standing Committee A

Relevant European Community documents

(a) 8149/88 Protection of Wildlife and Natural Habitats

(b) 9204/89 Protection of Wildlife and Natural Habitats

(c) 5807/90 Protection of Wildlife and Natural Habitats

(d) 4684/91 Protection of Wildlife and Natural Habitats

(e) 6553/90 Import Ban on Furs

(f) 5618/91 Import Ban on Furs

(g) 6719/90 Nature Conservation (ACNAT) + ADD 1

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43-xxxix (1987-88)

(b) HC 11-iii (1989-90)

(c) HC 11-xxiv (1989-90)

(d) HC 29-xvi (1990-91) and HC 29-xx (1990-91)

(e) HC 15-xxx (1988-89)

(f) HC 29-xx (1990-91)

(g) HC 11-xxxii (1989-90)

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community document

10146/90 Labelling of Tobacco Products

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

HC 29-xi (1990-91) and HC 29-xx (1990-91)]

Dr. Cunningham: Can the Leader of the House confirm what the press has apparently already been told—that the much-delayed White Paper on education and training will be published on Monday next week? If the right hon. Gentleman can confirm that, as I expect that he should be able to do, will he assure us that there will be an oral statement in the Chamber on the publication of this important White Paper? It can hardly be argued that next week is a particularly heavy week for business. Indeed, I was tempted to say when I put the question: "Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week, if there is any?"

May we have an assurance that the appropriate Ministers will come to the House of Commons to announce their proposals and policies and will not announce them in a press conference outside Parliament?

I am sure that Members on both sides of the House were dismayed by today's unemployment figures. I share the view that Tory Members are concerned—they certainly should be as concerned as we are—about the awful, record rise in unemployment last month, the worst figures for April since the war.

That was coupled with two surveys, one from the engineering union pointing out that about 100,000 jobs had been lost in manufacturing industry, and one from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations showing that about 33,000 training places for people with disabilities had been lost because of Government cuts.

May we have an early debate on the Government's employment policies? It must be in the interests of the reputation of the House of Commons that we should have such a debate, and one would have thought that the Government would want an opportunity to give an explanation of what has happened in that context. I hope, therefore, that the Leader of the House will arrange for an early debate on employment policy and the disastrous consequences of the Government's economic policy failures in respect of jobs.

It is clear that the Government do not have much business for the House to conduct. In those circumstances, why do they continue to refuse our offer to co-operate now on legislation to abolish the poll tax? Why must we wait for the abolition of that detested tax when there is all the parliamentary time in the world to introduce a Bill right now? Why are the Government declining our offer?

Mr. MacGregor: I will answer first the first and last points made by the hon. Gentleman. On the first, the hon. Gentleman tries to pretend every week that there is not a great deal of Government business. The House will have noted that we have been very busy this week, and I suspect that we shall be very busy today dealing with amendments to the Planning and Compensation Bill *[Lords]*. Is he suggesting that we have no business to conduct today? If so, and if, as he said, we have little business to conduct, does he agree that we shall get through today's business extremely quickly and that the House will rise shortly?

Dr. Cunningham: Answer the question.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is obviously getting embarrassed by this line of response. He says each week that we do not have much to do, when it is obvious that the House has a great deal of legislation to take through, and that will be clear today as it will be next week. So he cannot go on peddling that line, which is far from reality. In fact, the House has been dealing with 35 Bills, with quite a number still to come, leaving aside the Finance Bill. That is more than in the past two Sessions. The House still has a great deal of business to do.

The hon. Gentleman employs the trick of asking for a debate on one thing or another and then, when I grant it —as I did with the public expenditure debate this week, which he knew I was keen to have—he claims that it is a light week. He cannot have it all ways. The hon. Gentleman talks total nonsense.

As for next week, the hon. Gentleman will know that on Tuesday we shall be dealing with two major items, one of which involves 63 amendments from the House of Lords —the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill, and the remaining stages of the New Roads and Street Works Bill. That is a major undertaking. He cannot claim that the House is facing a light load when the position is entirely the opposite. There is a great deal of work to be done.

That is partly the answer to the point the hon. Gentleman made about unemployment. A number of the debates that we have had—on the Finance Bill, public expenditure plans and so on—all enabled employment issues to be raised, as they were raised in the debate yesterday, when it was clear that the Opposition proposals would greatly add to unemployment, rather than the reverse.

I noted that, when the hon. Gentleman talked about Government cuts in relation to employment measures, he added yet again to the range of issues where the Labour party is proposing to spend a great deal more money and is not prepared to face up to the need for higher taxation that would be involved under its policies.

I can confirm that there will be a White Paper on education and training, although I cannot at this stage confirm exactly when. But I have noted the hon. Gentleman's request—that there should be an oral statement in the House—and I hope to agree to that.

Mr. Speaker: The House has just heard what the Leader of the House said. Thirty-four groups of amendments have been tabled to the Bill under consideration this afternoon. Will hon. Members therefore ask questions about next week's business and not make general points?

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will my right hon. Friend allow time for an early statement on the adequacy of safety precautions for the transport of toxic or flammable goods by rail? Is he aware that, in the early hours of this morning, at Bradford-on-Tone near Wellington in my constituency, there was a derailment followed by an immense fire in which, thankfully, no one appears to have been injured? However, great concern and alarm has been caused in the surrounding community. We must thank providence that the accident did not happen as the train passed through a built-up area. May we have an urgent inquiry into the causes of the accident, and can the results be brought before the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand entirely my hon. Friend's point and agree that it was fortunate that no injuries were reported. As he knows, as a result of the fire, the line is likely to be closed for about two days. It is too early for the cause to be established, but I confirm that British Rail will be holding an internal inquiry. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is in close touch with British Rail. I have noted my hon. Friend's request that the results of the inquiry should come before the House once the inquiry has been completed.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on unemployment which will allow us to examine not only the Government's abysmal record but the unemployment consequences of Labour's national minimum wage policy? Can the right hon. Gentleman also make time for repealing the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989, given the welcome statement by the Prime Minister that there will be a moratorium on mining in the Antarctic?

The Leader of the House has not stated the business for the first week after the recess. Does he know something that we do not?

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, if he had been present on the numerous occasions when that question has been raised—I am sure that he was here—he would know that much attention has been focused on unemployment issues, especially on the point that he raised—the serious consequences for higher unemployment of the Labour party's proposal for a minimum wage.

As for a Bill to repeal the Antarctic Minerals Act, we still have a great deal of legislation to take through the House this Session and I do not contemplate adding such a Bill to the already heavy load.

The significance of my not making a statement on business for the first week after the recess is that I am embarrassed by the choice of business still to be conducted in the House. There is no lack of choice but rather too much, and I hope to be able to make that choice soon. It is difficult to do so today, but I intend to make a statement on that subject next week.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although it is important to have a debate on the civil service, an issue that concerns not only the House but the whole country is the world environment? It is time that we had a debate on the report of the Select Committee on the Environment on tropical rain forests and other such matters, all of which are vital to us and future generations. The report seems to have been shelved for so long that there are inches of dust on it.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that that issue is important. I have said in past business statements that I hope at some stage to find time to discuss it. It is a question not simply of the Select Committee report but of the Government's response to it. I hope that we can debate those matters, because they are important. I know that my hon. Friend did not wish to underestimate the importance of the debate that we shall have for half a day on Monday. He will have noticed that we shall deal with opposed private business at 7 o'clock.

The next steps reforms in the civil service are among the greatest undertaken in the civil service for a long time. They will achieve much greater effectiveness and value for money, which is what the Government's policies are

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about, and are already making considerable progress. The document "Making the most of Next Steps" is being published this afternoon and the debate is therefore relevant.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): In the light of an event this week, will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week that there will not be a summer general election?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not a matter for a business statement at this stage, and I certainly do not intend to make such an announcement.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): As the NATO summit has been postponed from June until the autumn because the allies have been unable to agree on a European strategy, will my right hon. Friend make time for a wide-ranging debate on defence and security, especially as it affects Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: We certainly must find time for our usual defence debates. I hope to find time during the summer. We have already had one such debate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Has the Leader of the House any information about whether there might be a statement early next week about the "World in Action" programme on the Larry Goodman agricultural empire, particularly as it affects the economy of Northern Ireland, bank loans and the employment prospects of many people?

Mr. MacGregor: I have no such information.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): May I urge my right hon. Friend to accede to the request of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for a debate on employment? Given the recent decision by the Sabanci group in Turkey to create several hundred jobs in textile manufacturing in my constituency, we would welcome the opportunity to highlight this Government's policies, which have made Britain the foremost place in Europe for inward investment by those seeking to invest in the heart of the world's manufacturing zone. Such a debate would also give us a wonderful opportunity to contrast those policies with the Opposition's policies, particularly those on minimum wages, which would wipe out millions of jobs in this country.

Mr. MacGregor: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that we want to seek every opportunity to contrast the Government's employment policies with those of the Labour party. We have done so frequently recently, and with increasing effect.

Dr. Cunningham: Let us have a debate.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman says, "Let us have a debate", but we debated the subject yesterday. Perhaps he was not here to hear the issues being debated, but I was, and effective arguments were deployed by Conservative Members. It was clear which party had the best policies.

I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said on inward investment, and the specific example that he gave. I hope that he will find opportunities to make that point again.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I know that not many of us enjoy vindaloo curry, but may we have the subject of press abuse on the menu next week because it is important to all of us?

Mr. MacGregor: No, Sir.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on dogs, and particularly on the increase in the vicious practice of dog fights? May we include in that debate discussions on penalties for the promotion of dog fights, bearing in mind the fact that the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Act 1987 that I introduced a few years ago, which doubled the penalty for such behaviour, is proving inadequate?

Mr. MacGregor: I know of the concern among hon. Members about recent attacks by dogs. The subject has been raised on a number of occasions. I fully understand and share my hon. Friend's concern. As he knows, a number of possible options for toughening the law on dogs were set out in the Government's consultation paper on the control of dogs. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering those options and will bring forward his proposals in the summer. From April 1992, the Government intend to implement the package of dog control measures contained in the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Lord President seek to find time to debate the future of ICI? Does he agree that it is the wickedest face of capitalism, as well as the unacceptable face of capitalism, for Lord Hanson to buy £250 million-worth of shares in the company and see the price rise again today by 65p so that he can without any effort make a tidy profit on the backs of those on Teesside who work for, are committed to and respect ICI? Are we not seeing the worst aspect of Tory Government in operation across the floor of the stock exchange?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, if Hanson does acquire a large enough stake in ICI or makes a takeover bid for that company, it will fall to be considered by the European Commission, under the European Community merger regulations, or by the United Kingdom competition authorities. Obviously, those are hypothetical matters and I am basing my remarks on that hypothesis. The acquisition by Hanson of what I understand to be a 2·82 per cent. shareholding in ICI does not constitute a qualifying merger under the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the City code on takeovers and mergers lays down the circumstances in which an announcement about a takeover bid is required. That would be a matter for the takeover panel to supervise.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my right hon. Friend use his influence to have employment, not unemployment, figures published? Today the fact has been published that there are more people at work in Scotland than there have ever been, and half a million more than under a Socialist Government. Will he also arrange a debate, next week if possible but soon thereafter if not, to trumpet abroad the fact that under their economic policy the Government have in 10 short years achieved a triumph in the transformation of the life and culture of Scotland? They have housed the Burrell

collection, renewed the national gallery of Scotland, the national library and the new museum of modern art, given funds for the new museum of Scotland and done a thousand other things.

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend about the transformation in Scotland. It has been a good example of the success of the Government's policies in the past 12 years. I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend could name a thousand other things, and I could add many to those that he mentioned.

My hon. and learned Friend was also right about employment. It is important to keep stressing the fact that the work force in employment has increased by more than 3·1 million since March 1983 and that there are almost 27 million jobs in the United Kingdom. The facts of employment show that there were considerable advances during the 1980s.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the rules on ministerial conduct require that on a visit a Minister must ensure separation between his political activities and those that he undertakes in his ministerial role? In that context, will the Secretary of State for Wales make a statement next week to explain why, on a recent series of official engagements, he has been using the official sections of his visits to advance the candidacy of a local prospective parliamentary candidate?

Mr. MacGregor: I know nothing about the right hon. Gentleman's allegations, so I do not wish to say anything about them. However, I do not believe that that is the type of issue on which a statement is required next week.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Without impugning anyone's motives—in the way that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) did—does my right hon. Friend nevertheless accept that there might be a need for an early debate on or statement about the developing situation at ICI? In view of the strategic and security implications of some parts of ICI's research and development programme, does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a public interest dimension as well as a share price dimension to the future of that great British company which must be kept under tight parliamentary scrutiny?

Mr. MacGregor: I note what my hon. Friend says, but I do not think that it would be appropriate to have a statement or a debate next week. However, if there are issues that hon. Members wish to raise, there are a number of ways in which they can raise them.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May we have a debate on the increased price of water? Is the Minister aware that Yorkshire Water has increased its prices by 15 per cent. and that that hurts people on fixed incomes who receive no rebates? More important, is he aware that small businesses are now being forced to install meters and that the private company can force entry if the businesses object? Such a practice is adding to the difficulties facing many small businesses in my constituency.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that the hon. Lady's last point is relevant to the burden on small businesses. It is widely recognised that for businesses, and perhaps increasingly for households, water metering is a fair way to make charges.

On the hon. Lady's first point, she knows that the water companies are undertaking massive capital investment to improve water quality and to deal with environmental matters, and that has to be paid for. The Opposition call for improvement in environmental issues and in water quality, but often they are not prepared to face the consequence of who pays for it. That is typical of their approach.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 812?

[That this House notes with concern the continuing high level in the United Kingdom of deaths related to the abuse of solvent and volatile substances; further notes that draft figures for 1990 show that at least 120 people died from solvent abuse in that year, a rise of 6 per cent. over the 1989 level of 113 deaths; in this light, particularly welcomes the work of Resolv (The Society for the Prevention of Solvent and Volatile Substance Abuse) in helping to combat this problem; and congratulates those honourable Members who have established a new all-party parliamentary group to examine the issue.]

It draws attention to the continuing high level of deaths related to solvent abuse. Figures for 1990 show that at least 120 people died. Will my right hon. Friend also join me in congratulating Resolv on its work? Will he arrange for an early debate on that important subject?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, there are various ways in which hon. Members can raise issues in the House. In view of the heavy pressure on Government time, I cannot promise a debate on the issue. I had noticed the early-day motion. The Government are well aware of the problem of volatile substance misuse and are naturally concerned by the number of deaths related to such misuse. Our policy is focused on supporting initiatives that concentrate on the information and education not only of young people at risk, but of adults, including parents, professional workers and retailers who may become involved. We have taken a number of steps in that area.

My hon. Friend mentioned Resolv. We recognise the important part that it plays, and I point out to my hon. Friend that it receives Government support. The Government are monitoring trends in the nature of solvent misuse to see whether further effective action can be taken.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House make arrangements for an early debate on the Government's policies towards the middle east, so that a clear statement can be made on the Government's attitude towards the peace conference proposed by the United States, on—I hope—the inclusion of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in that conference, and on whether the Government are prepared to recognise the right of self-determination of Kurdish people as the only basis for a long-term peace settlement in the region? Too many lives have already been lost as a result of political instability in the region. Surely we now need a debate on a peaceful solution to all the problems and conflicts in that region.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said, I am prepared to see whether time can be given, either through statements or a debate at an appropriate time, to deal with those important matters. However, it cannot be next week.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Last week, my right hon. Friend said that there would shortly

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be a debate on the subject of charge capping. As he probably knows, the announcements are being made this afternoon. My right hon. Friend said nothing in his statement about a possible debate. When are we likely to have one?

Mr. MacGregor: There was reference to such a debate in the statement, but it may not have been immediately obvious. The motion on the Charge Limitation (England) (Maximum Amount) Order on Tuesday next week is precisely that.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Leader of the House answer a question the answer to which will be of interest to the public. Will he confirm——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the question about business next week?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes. Will the Leader of the House make provision for a statement setting out the role of Members of Parliament? Will he confirm that there are at least 100 Members of Parliament, who are all Conservative Members and who are all on the payroll vote because they are Ministers, who cannot ask written or oral questions? They do not have that right. Will the right hon. Gentleman simply confirm from the Dispatch Box that that is the case?

Mr. MacGregor: There has been no change in the position on Ministers in relation to questions. I do not think a statement is required next week.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will doubtless have had his attention drawn to the grave warning issued yesterday by the director general of the general agreement on tariffs and trade that, if the European Community and the United States do not reach agreement early, the collapse of trade, employment and growth could make the great depression look like a period to which we would wish to return. If that is so, should not we debate the matter as soon as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I have answered questions on the subject on a number of occasions. I confirm that I believe that the GATT talks are extremely important. The British Government regretted that the talks did not reach a conclusion in the timetable for which people hoped and we are using every endeavour to try to achieve a successful outcome of the GATT talks. There will no doubt be times when it will be appropriate to have a discussion in the House, but I do not think that it will be next week.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Leader of the House recall that in the past year I have often asked for a debate on the present condition of the prison service? Since I last asked for a debate, there have been, as the right hon. Gentleman will recall, further suicides in prison. Prisons are overcrowded and more than 800 persons are presently remanded in police station cells rather than in prisons. There have been rulings against us in the European Court of Justice and various other matters have been raised in connection with prison discipline and medical services. It is a disgrace. May we have a debate as soon as possible on the whole future of the prison service?

Mr. MacGregor: I note the hon. Gentleman's request and I am grateful for his reference to "as soon as possible". Contrary to the view that the hon. Gentleman seems to take, my difficulty is that an immense amount of business is being undertaken and there are many requests for parliamentary time. I will bear it in mind.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will be aware of early-day motion 667, which has been signed by more than 100 hon. Members.

[That this House notes with grave concern the findings of a survey by the National Association of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing and Enforcement Officers which revealed that in the 136 councils that replied 486 criminal records had actually been discovered in a 18 month period, none of which had initially been declared during the interviews which took place under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 which required a district council not to grant a licence unless they are satisfied that the applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a taxi driver's licence; calls upon the Home Office, the Department of Transport and the Association of Chief Police Officers to co-operate in the release of past criminal records of all new applicants to the chairmen of district licensing committees in a confidential file, so as to prevent any recurrence of what occurred in Southampton where a licence was given to a convicted rapist; and calls for a similar system to be introduced as that practised in London where the Metropolitan Police have access to criminal records when determining applicants for Hackney carriage driver's licences to be expanded to all district councils in the United Kingdom.]

The matter is worrying many local authorities and it requires legislation and, possibly, a debate next week. Surely we can persuade the police to release criminal histories of would-be applicants for taxi drivers' licences. The situation in many local authorities is a scandal and the House is becoming extremely worried about it.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that my hon. Friend has raised that point before during business questions. Let me bring my hon. Friend up to date. The Home Office has recently discussed with the Association of Chief Police Officers whether the police could take on that task. The question will be looked at again in the light of the forthcoming report of the Home Office on criminal records.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to new clause 3 of the Planning and Compensation Bill which is to be debated this afternoon. That clause provides for the enactment of equivalent legislation for Northern Ireland by an Order in Council subject to negative resolution which, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, is never debated at any time in the House. Is it not inappropriate to add such a clause at virtually the last stage of the Bill, thus depriving Northern Ireland Members of the opportunity of debating its application to Northern Ireland at a later stage? Can the Leader of the House provide a better way of handling that matter and enable us to debate it at another time?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will be able to raise that matter this afternoon during the debate on new clause 3.

Mr. Trimble: Not when I am attending the Northern Ireland Committee.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): May we please have a debate on the management of public sector pension funds in the light of the report published this week on the management of Derbyshire county council's pension fund by the district auditor, who says that the council has claimed a profit on shares which turned out to be worthless and that councillors voted £2 million of public money to be put into shares in a private company of which they were secretly directors, most of which has gone missing? Does he agree with the district auditor and the council's independent financial adviser that those actions amount to chicanery—that is the word that was used? What does my right hon. Friend feel that we should now do to bring those people to book?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not had the benefit of seeing the report, but I know there is much local concern about the issue. My hon. Friend may wish to find other opportunities to have it discussed in the House.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Before a general election is called, should we not have a debate about the state of the franchise, since it appears from the number of people aged over 18 in the population that 750,000 people are missing from the electoral register? We should discuss how that can be corrected before a general election.

Mr. MacGregor: I notice that the hon. Gentleman is worried about the election. This is not a matter for which I can find Government time next week.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Why are we wasting yet more time next week on the obsolete Victorian farce of private legislation? Is it not high time that it was all scrapped? At the same time, will my hon. Friend find time for my Established Church Bill, which would scrap Church Measures as well?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know about finding time for my hon. Friend's Bill next week, but I agree that there is a need to reform the way in which the House handles private Bills. As he will know, we have already proposed changes to the procedures which will come into operation next Session and which will make some difference. But more important than that is the legislation which will follow from the Department of Transport consultation document on various aspects of private Bill procedure for which we hope to find early legislative time. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will shortly be giving the Government's response to that consultation document.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May we have an early debate on foreign affairs, which would allow the House to review the relationship between Her Majesty's Government and the Indian Government, and discussion of the continuing and serious human rights violations in the Punjab and Kashmir? The House could also consider the case of Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal, whose circumstances are set out in early-day motion 828.

[That this House expresses concern that Karamjit Singh Chahal, a British citizen settled in the United Kingdom since 1974, has been detained in Bedford Prison since August 1990; notes Mr. Chahal is detained subject to a notice of the Secretary of State's decision to make a deportation order under section 3(5)(b) of the Immigration Act 1971 for reasons of national security and other reasons of a political nature; calls for Mr. Chahal to be released immediately pending his being allowed to appeal, with legal representation, against refusal by the Home Secretary to grant political asylum in the United Kingdom; expresses concern that if Mr. Chahal is deported to India he is likely, in the view of Amnesty International, to be subjected to torture, disappearance or extrajudicial execution; recalls Mr. Chahal, when visiting India in 1984, was arrested and detained at Mehta police station for nine days, during which he was beaten and otherwise ill-treated and that he was transferred to a police station in Amritsar and held for another 10 or 11 days, during which he was subjected to torture, including severe beatings and electric shock treatments; and regrets that a number of Mr. Chahal's relatives have been tortured or ill-treated while held in police custody, that two relatives have recently been killed by security forces, allegedly in fake encounters and that another relative, Kulwant Singh Nagoke, died in police custody.]

If Mr. Chahal has committed offences relating to national security, why is he not being brought to trial in a British court rather than be facing removal to India without the right of appeal or of legal representation—removal to a place where he was tortured in 1984? Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate so that all those matters can be raised by the many right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House who are deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in India?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware that a number of hon. Members want a foreign affairs debate to be arranged. However, it is not possible to find time for one at present.

As for early-day motion 828 and the case of Mr. Chahal, it is not the practice—as the hon. Member knows—to give detailed reasons for deportation decisions taken on national security grounds. Mr. Chahal has access to legal advice, and he has intimated his wish to make representations to the three advisers. Arrangements are being made for them to consider his case, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will review it fully in the light of the advisers' recommendations.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an urgent debate on the position of teachers in grant-maintained schools? Is he aware that there are strong voices in the Labour movement arguing that those teaching in grant-maintained schools should be sacked, discriminated against or denied employment in maintained schools simply because they work in the grant-maintained sector? Is that not a particularly nasty, vicious, and spineless example of modern-day Labour party thinking, and should it not be resisted by the House at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will know that I am aware of some of the statements made by some Labour education spokesmen on those matters.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Not from this Front Bench.

Mr. MacGregor: I said "some Labour spokesmen" on education matters. I chose my words with great care. As far as I am aware, they were not said from the Labour Front Bench. However, I know that such action has been suggested, and therefore that there is a debate in the Labour party on that issue. I know also that those threats have sometimes been made. I entirely agree with my hon.

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Friend, and I hope that those threats will not be tolerated and will be rejected by the teachers—not least those in grant-maintained schools who are active Labour supporters and who see for themselves their great merits.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the debate that is to take place in European Standing Committee B next Wednesday morning on the labelling of tobacco is distinct from the recent proposal relating to the advertising of tobacco goods? Does he agree that it is wholly undesirable for EEC Commissioners to hold press conferences about proposals when the documents relating to them are not in the possession of the Government, the House, or the British public? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the issues raised by the set of documents on tobacco relate not only to the merits of the matter and to the law, on which very strong views are held in the House, but to who makes the law, where it is made, and under what powers it is determined under the treaties? Both aspects are relevant to the documents.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree that both aspects are relevant, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue so that I can clear up any confusion that might arise in the minds of the public. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that the two matters are distinct. Next week, Standing Committee B will debate labelling and a ban on oral snuff products. It represents an amendment to an existing directive. The proposed new directive relates to the advertising of tobacco products. As the hon. Gentleman knows very well—because this is on the recommendation of his Select Committee on European Legislation—the labelling directive needs to be debated soon, because a decision by the Council on a common position may be imminent. The advertising issue is quite separate, as is its timing.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, it will be a good many months before the European Council is asked to make a decision, so it is not urgent, and there will be time to consider the issues in a measured and sensible way. That will include, when the documents are available, scrutiny by the Select Committee of the new draft directive and its decision on what the House should do about it.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend will know that local authorities have been given until 14 June to submit evidence to the Department of the Environment about the future structure of local government. Bearing in mind the pressure of time, will he consider arranging a debate soon after the recess so that the matter can be dealt with in the House before local authorities have managed to give their evidence?

Mr. MacGregor: I note what my hon. Friend has said, but I fear that it is extremely unlikely that we shall have time for such a debate before 14 June. That date, of course, marks only the end of the consultation process; there will be time for the House to consider the issues after that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May we have a debate next week on the allocation of the new accommodation that will become available in the offices in Upper Parliament street? While we are at it, perhaps we could decide in the same debate how we can make our facilities more attractive to ex-Prime Ministers, so that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) can come and make a speech here. I believe that she has been here only three times since last November. We could save her all the time and effort involved in travelling around the world and making speeches in the United States and South Africa—but perhaps she does not feel comfortable sitting among her so-called friends on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that we can have a debate about accommodation next week. Perhaps worry about his own accommodation is at the back of the hon. Gentleman's question; if so, he knows that there are those to whom he can make application.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Has my right hon. Friend read early-day motion 776?

[That this House, conscious of the fact that real care for the men and women of our armed forces has enabled our country to rely, even to the point of ultimate sacrifice, upon their loyalty, steadfastness and efficiency in times of grave national threat, is astounded to note that, when digging a trench during an official Army exercise in Canada in July 1989, three men of the Grenadier Guards (Adrian Hicks, John Ray and Sean Povey) detonated a six year old unexploded shell which not only rendered them limbless but caused them such grievous wounds that Mr. Ray and Mr. Povey are still, after almost two years, in receipt of hospital treatment; notes that the Ministry of Defence find themselves unable, on the grounds of unattributable negligence, to pay compensation; and calls upon the Prime Minister to review this case personally and to ensure that, regardless of the possible legal responsibility of some unknown nation who failed to 'clear' the shell some six years previously, Her Majesty's Government is seen to follow truly a policy that shows an appreciation of human understanding, human dignity and the value of a human life on earth by awarding generous compensation and a return of the accumulated legal costs to these youthful British Grenadiers.]

The motion, which has been signed by more than 160 right hon. and hon. Members on a cross-Bench basis, refers to a tragic Army training accident in Canada, in which three men of the Grenadier Guards—Adrian Hicks, John Ray and Sean Povey—had their legs blown off. Their injuries were so grievous that now, after two years, only one of them is fit enough to be invalided out of the Army; and he was invalided out with legal benefits that can at best be described only as derisory. That was the fault not of the Army, but of a gap in the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987. May we please have a debate on the Act so that we can ensure that that gap is filled?

In the meantime, will my right hon. Friend urge the Prime Minister to look at the matter personally and urgently to ensure that generous ex gratia compensation is given to those men? If that creates a precedent, so be it: surely we are here to create a good precedent.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that every hon. Member fully sympathises with those three service men, and was very concerned to hear what happened to them. I assure the House and my hon. Friend that the Government are dealing fully and sympathetically with the matter, and would do the same for any other service man injured as a result of serving in the armed forces.

As my hon. Friend knows, in this unfortunate case the Ministry of Defence was not legally liable for the injuries that were sustained. None of the three service men is in

receipt of a service invaliding pension from the Ministry. I understand, however, that yesterday the Department of Social Security approved the award of a war pension to one of them. If they are discharged, the other two will be entitled to apply for such award. Once such awards are approved, the Ministry of Defence converts the service invaliding pensions already being paid to service men to tax-free service attributable pensions.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Leader of the House will be aware that between 1964 and 1966, and between 1974 and 1979, both the major parties in the House required hon. Members to be brought into the precincts of Westminster when they were ill—sometimes seriously ill. On occasion they were brought from hospital so that they could be nodded through and majorities could be maintained or, in some instances, challenged.

Given that, at the next general election, the electorate may not confer an absolute majority on one party, would it not be a good idea to embark on urgent talks so that we can find a far more civilised way of enabling hon. Members to vote when they are critically ill?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not a matter for the business of the House next week. The hon. Gentleman raises a hypothetical question. I expect that the Conservative party will be on this side of the House for some time with a big enough majority.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): My right hon. Friend will recall that, on the relief of Mafeking, the House sent a message of congratulation to its people. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate so that a similar message can be sent to the people of Brent? The people in that beleaguered borough were relieved last night from the yoke of a Labour council when two Labour members defected to an independent party which supports the Conservative party. Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate so that the Liberal party can explain to the country why, when even Labour elected members found the policies of their party unpalatable, the Liberals supported them to the end?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes an effective point. I am sure that he will continue to make it, and that it will be made clear to the people of Brent.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Leader of the House give the most serious consideration to an early debate, even just a three-hour debate, on the current circumstances of the United Kingdom shipbuilding and marine engineering industry? That industry has become the forgotten industry of the United Kingdom. We have not had a debate on it for some considerable time. We should be allowed to examine the implementation of the seventh directive on the shipbuilding intervention fund and other matters such as the threat by Kvaerner Kincaid to cease building marine engines in my constituency. Many people in that industry are deeply worried about the parlous future that they face. Surely we are entitled to ask for an early debate on their future.

Mr. MacGregor: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and I do not in any way underestimate the importance of the issue that he raises. However, the business for the next few weeks makes it extremely unlikely that I shall be able to find time for a debate in Government time. It is, of course, always open to others to find time that is available to them to raise such matters. But I do not underestimate the importance of the industry. I fully understand the great importance of the issues and of the industry.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): As we move into the warmer and open-window season when neighbourhood noise becomes even more of an urban menace, may we have a debate and perhaps a statement so that we can examine the issue and how our fellow citizens can protect themselves from the thoughtless actions of their neighbours? Perhaps the Government could also announce a public information and education campaign to persuade people to be more reasonable.

Mr. MacGregor: I thought for a moment that my hon. Friend was about to refer to the sticky July month here in the House. He will have to find other opportunities to raise in the near future the matter to which he referred. As I have had to say to others, we have a great deal of business to do in Government time.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the Leader of the House reverse the decision that he has already made about the need for a debate or a statement about the proposed takeover of ICI by the despicable Lord Hanson, whose record has been one of asset stripping——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows that he must not refer in those terms to a member of the other place. Will he please withdraw the word "despicable"?

Mr. Skinner: The despicable Hanson Corporation—will that do? *[Interruption.]* I thought it might. The Hanson record has been one of asset stripping. It is no use the Leader of the House talking about the takeover panel, because it missed the Guinness scandal, which went straight under its nose. There are 52,000 jobs at stake. Let the workers have a ballot and not allow Hanson to take the company over with the Government helping their friends.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not make any decision. I simply made a clear statement of the position on any potential takeover or merger.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on damage to the environment caused by some groups of itinerants? Will a Government measure, designed to give stronger powers to keep itinerants off private land, be one of those introduced to keep us busy over the coming months?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of my hon. Friend's particular interest in this matter. He will be aware of the legislative provisions that are available to deal with it.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on wages and other incomes? In such a debate we could discuss the admirable proposals for a minimum wage. That would help people on poverty wages who have to clock on and clock off. Tory MPs who condemn the proposal would also have an opportunity to explain their position. How many of them, earning £30,000 a year here, are doubling, trebling or quadrupling their incomes by moonlighting as parliamentary advisers, company directors, and so on? We ought to be given an opportunity to expose the rank hypocrisy of those people who attack the poorest of the poor while they use this place to line their pockets.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows about having two jobs, for he was a Member of the European Parliament as well as of this House.

Mr. Cryer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. MacGregor: On the question of a national minimum wage—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No point of order arises. The hon. Gentleman must not, from a sedentary position, carry on a conversation. He should listen to what the Leader of the House has to say.

Mr. MacGregor: We shall certainly be very happy to continue to debate the Opposition's proposals for a national minimum wage. I have made that clear several times. The matter has already been debated, and I hope that there will be further debates. Our estimates of the number of jobs lost simply have not been refuted by the Opposition, nor is that possible.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many Government Members would like to have an early debate on the performance of water companies since privatisation? A debate would give the House an opportunity not only to set out the great success of privatisation but to question the shortness of the period over which some capital investment is being written off. Is my right hon. Friend aware, for example, that Eastbourne Water—previously a statutory company—has increased its charges by 100 per cent. over the past three years? That is something that my late constituent and parliamentary neighbour, Ian Gow, challenged last year, as did I. The situation has arisen largely because the director general has allowed investment to be written off over a very short period.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a debate on this matter, or on water companies generally, in the near future. As I have said, we have a very busy programme.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am grateful for having been called, Mr. Speaker.

I should like the Leader of the House to do a very simple job next week. He has been good at some things—and he knows what I mean. Will he drag a Treasury Minister to the Dispatch Box to tell the House why the Treasury is interfering with the allocation of finance from Europe, through Commissioner Millan, for areas, such as my constituency, where the Government have closed down mines? The money to which I refer is made available for the specific purpose of helping such communities to overcome their problems by creating jobs where the Government have created unemployment.

Mr. MacGregor: In a moment, I shall say something nice to the hon. Gentleman. In answer to his main charge, I have to point out that there has been a considerable improvement in the employment situation over not many years. The point about a Treasury Minister coming to the Dispatch Box is one that he himself must pursue. I cannot promise Government time for a debate next week.

With regard to the simple job to which the hon. Gentleman referred—I think that I know what he has in mind—I can promise that I hope to have one of the issues settled in the House next week. I know that it is of importance to him. Indeed, provision is made for it in next week's business, and I hope very much to be able myself to see it through the House.

Whitsun Adjournment

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that, on the motion for the Adjournment on Thursday 23 May, up to nine hon. Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the results made known as soon as possible thereafter.

Points of Order

4.24 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Today—perhaps the Leader of the House would listen to what I have to say—I gave the right hon. Gentleman the opportunity to explain the position about the tabling of oral and written questions by Ministers, who make up approximately 100 Members of the House of Commons. Unfortunately, in a flippant reply, he refused to advise the House and the country about the position. Perhaps, in the absence of a proper reply from the Leader of the House, you, Mr. Speaker, might care to explain the position to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I thought that the hon. Member asked for a statement next week on that matter. When the hon. Gentleman mentioned it to me, I thought that he was referring to our exchanges last week on business questions. I think that the whole House knows that there are constraints on Ministers, as there are constraints upon me and upon shadow Ministers, tabling questions, but it is not a matter for me.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House suggested that, during a short overlap period when I was also an MEP, I was at a financial advantage because I received one third extra to my parliamentary salary. I placed on the record repeatedly at the time—the Leader of the House has deliberately forgotten that—the fact that that money was given to the Sheffield Labour movement and benefited it. I received no advantage from it.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that that is a matter for me either.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

Ordered,

That the Home-Grown Cereals Authority Levy (Variation) Scheme (Approval) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

Planning and Compensation Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Ordered,

That the Planning and Compensation Bill [*Lords*], as amended, be considered in the following order, namely: new Clauses, new Schedules, Amendments relating to Clause 1, Clause 31, Clause 2, Clause 32, Clauses 3 and 4, Clause 33, Clause 5, Clause 34, Clause 6, Clause 35, Clause 7, Clause 36, Clause 8, Clause 37, Clause 9, Clause 38, Clause 10, Clause 39, Clause 11, Clause 40, Clause 12, Clause 45, Clause 13, Clause 41, Clause 14, Clause 44, Clause 15, Clause 42, Clause 16, Clause 43, Clause 17, Clause 46, Clauses 18 to 20, Schedule 1, Clause 47, Schedule 7, Clause 21, Clause 48, Clause 22, Clause 23, Clause 49, Clause 50, Clause 24, Schedule 2, Clause 51, Schedule 8, Clause 25, Schedule 3, Clause 26, Schedule 4, Clause 52, Schedule 9, Clauses 27 to 29, Schedule 5, Clause 53, Schedule 10, Clause 30, Schedule 6, Clause 54, Schedule 11, Clause 55, Clause 69, Clause 56, Clause 66, Clause 57, Clause 67, Clause 58, Clause 68, Clause 59, Schedule 12, Clause 70, Schedule 14, Clause 60, Clause 71, Clause 61, Clause 64, Clause 62, Clause 65, Clause 63, Schedule 13, Clause 72, Schedule 15, Clause 73, Schedule 16, Clauses 74 to 76 and Schedule 17.—*[Sir George Young.]*

New clause 1

OLD MINING PERMISSIONS

'.—(1) In this section and Schedule *(Registration of old mining permissions)* to this Act, "old mining permission" means any planning permission for development—

(a) consisting of the winning and working of minerals, or

(b) involving the depositing of mineral waste,

which was deemed to be granted under Part III of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 by virtue of section 77 of that Act (development authorised under interim development orders after 21st July 1943).

(2) An old mining permission shall, if an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is finally determined, have effect as from the final determination as if granted on the terms required to be registered.

(3) If no such development has, at any time in the period of two years ending with 1st May 1991, been carried out to any substantial extent anywhere in, on or under the land to which an old mining permission relates, that permission shall not authorise any such development to be carried out at any time after the coming into force of this section unless—

(a) the permission has effect in accordance with subsection (2) above, and

(b) the development is carried out after such an application is finally determined.

(4) An old mining permission shall—

(a) if no application for the registration of the permission is made under that Schedule, cease to have effect on the day following the last date on which such an application may be made, and

(b) if such an application is refused, cease to have effect on the day following the date on which the application is finally determined.

(5) An old mining permission shall, if—

(a) such an application is granted, but

(b) an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is required to be served before the end of any period and is not so served,

cease to have effect on the day following the last date on which the application to determine those conditions may be served.

(6) Subject to subsection (3) above, this section—
(a) shall not affect any development carried out under an old mining permission before an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is finally determined or, as the case may be, the date on which the permission ceases to have effect, and
(b) shall not affect any order made or having effect as if made under section 102 of or Schedule 9 to the principal Act (discontinuance, etc., orders).

(7) This section and that Schedule, and the principal Act, shall have effect as if the section and Schedule were included in Part III of that Act.'—*[Sir George Young.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.26 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following: Government new clauses Nos. 8 and 15.
Government amendments Nos. 1 and 1(a).
Government amendment No. 104.
Government amendments Nos. 2 to 14.
Government amendment No. 69.
Government amendments Nos. 71 to 77.
Government amendments Nos. 15 to 18.
Government amendment No. 98.
Government amendment No. 99.
Government amendment No. 101.

Sir George Young: The subject of interim development order permissions for mineral working has been debated several times during the passage of the Bill, and I announced on 1 May my intention to table amendments to deal with the problems of absence of records, inadequate working and restoration conditions, and dormant sites. New clause 1 and amendment No. 1 give effect to those proposals—new clause 8 and amendment No. 104 make similar provision for Scotland.

First, they provide that land-owners or mineral owners with an IDO permission, who wish to apply to the mineral planning authority to have their permissions registered, must do so within six months of commencement of those provisions, or the permission will fall without compensation. Disputes about the validity of permissions will be determined by the Secretary of State. That will get the records straight and ensure that the extent and terms of IDO permissions are known.

Secondly, once it has been determined that there is a valid IDO permission, either by the mineral planning authority or by the Secretary of State on appeal, the holder must—within 12 months of that determination, or such longer period as may have been agreed with the mineral planning authority—submit a scheme of operating and restoration conditions for the MPA's approval or the permission will cease to have effect. That will get active sites up to standard.

In response to concerns expressed that the time period for registration and submission of schemes set out in our consultation paper was too short, we have provided for longer time periods and separated the two processes. There will be six months from commencement instead of four to submit applications for registration—as the time period is not public knowledge, applicants will have a much longer period—and a full year from the date the permission is registered for the submission of schemes. We have built in extra flexibility by providing that that period can be extended if the MPA agrees. That should provide a reasonable time for the industry to prepare itself and the flexibility to ensure that the system is not overloaded. I hope that that meets the concerns expressed in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie).

Thirdly, operations cannot recommence on dormant sites—sites where there has been no working to any substantial extent for two years preceding 1 May 1991—until the permission has been obtained as valid and a scheme of operating and restoration conditions has been approved. That is an important proposal. It meets many of the concerns that were expressed about the reactivation of IDO permissions on environmentally attractive sites.

4.30 pm

There will be no compensation for the cost of complying with conditions imposed, but there is provision for appeal to the Secretary of State against the imposition of unreasonable conditions and for the Secretary of State to call in an application for his own determination. We shall issue full guidance on the preparation of schemes and model conditions, which we shall discuss with representatives of the industry and mineral planning authorities with a view to publishing draft guidance in September.

I know that the industry is concerned that those proposals could lead to the imposition of unreasonable conditions that would diminish asset values. I think that its fears are misplaced. Throughout, I have drawn a distinction between expropriation of the asset and working it in a way that meets modern conditions. When representatives of the British Aggregate Construction Materials Industries came to see me, they stressed that they already worked their sites to such standards. I conclude, therefore, that what we are asking the industry to do is not unreasonable. None the less, I can assure the industry that we shall have in mind the concerns that it has expressed.

For working sites, we shall advise the mineral planning authorities that they should draw a distinction between conditions that deal with the environmental and amenity aspects of working the site, which should not affect the asset value, and conditions that would fundamentally affect the economic structure of the operation. Conditions that would significantly affect the asset value would be more appropriate for MPA reviews under the provisions introduced by the Minerals Act 1981. We shall want to issue clear guidance and consult the industry on that matter.

The amendments will ensure that in a relatively short period the details of all valid IDO permissions will be known, that the permissions are brought up to acceptable standards and that dormant sites cannot be reactivated without warning or proper conditions. That will bring the IDOs within the embrace of a modern planning system.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I apologise for allowing my hon. Friend to complete dealing with compensation before interrupting him. It is rather novel for a Conservative Government to say that constraints should be placed on private property—whether it is owned by a company is immaterial—without offering any compensation. My hon. Friend will have to justify that to the House in clearer terms.

Sir George Young: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, which was expressed by representatives of the industry. The key point is that the industry already claims that it is voluntarily operating its sites to modern working standards. Currently, IDOs are outside the planning system. We are asking the industry only to bring IDO permissions up to modern standards. If it is an environmentally responsible industry, already working to those standards, there is no need to compensate it.

I draw a distinction between conditions that deal with the environmental and amenity aspects of working the site, which would not affect the asset value and where compensation does not arise, and conditions that the mineral planning authority might want to impose, which would affect the economic structure of the operation. It will not be able to use the provisions before the House to impose conditions that fundamentally affect the economic structure of the operation. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that that should meet the industry's major concern.

As was made clear in response to the consultation exercise on IDOs and in debates in Committee, permissions for mineral working granted in the 1950s and 1960s may have conditions attached that fail to meet today's standards. Opposition Members have tabled an amendment to the proposed schedule on IDOs that seeks to prevent development from recommencing at any mineral site where permission was granted before 1965 and that has been inactive for five years until the environmental effects of the development have been assessed and new conditions agreed with the mineral planning authority. That amendment is identical to an amendment that we debated in Committee. I explained then that it is important to distinguish between IDO permissions, which were originally granted prior to the introduction of a comprehensive planning system in 1948, and permissions granted thereafter.

New clause 1 and amendment No. 1 address the immediate problem of bringing IDO permissions up to scratch, and as I have already said, we have provided that sites that have been inactive for two years—rather than the five years for which the Opposition amendment would provide—cannot be reactivated until a scheme of conditions has been approved by the MPA. Clearly, the preparation and approval of those conditions should have regard to the potential environmental effects of working the site, and we shall make that clear in the guidance that we issue.

As regards permissions granted in the 1950s and 1960s —or, indeed any mineral permissions which are now unsatisfactory—MPAs have existing powers to take action, including powers to prohibit the resumption of mineral working where a site has been inactive for several years. They have a duty to review mineral working sites in their area and to make such orders as they consider appropriate, updating those sites to modern standards. However, there is no time limit on the reviews, and orders can give rise to compensation, and progress has not been so fast as we would have hoped.

We therefore announced in the environment White paper our intention to review the mineral planning authorities' existing powers to take action to see whether any changes are necessary. That review is under way and that is the right place to consider the problems of 1950s and 1960s permissions, whether active or dormant. We shall consult on our proposals next year. I assure the House that we attach high priority to completing the review and we regard it as essential that any changes arising out of that review can be implemented quickly. We have tabled amendments to ensure that that can happen.

Amendments Nos. 2 to 6 provide a power for the Secretary of State to prescribe by order the periods in which MPAs must carry out their duty to review sites and the matters to be covered in such reviews. Amendments Nos. 72 to 75 make similar provision for Scotland.

Amendments Nos. 7 to 14 replace the existing powers on compensation in relation to winning and working, and those originally proposed in the Bill in relation to mineral waste, with a single order-making power to provide for the abatement of compensation, following orders updating permissions for the winning and working of minerals or the depositing of mineral waste. The amount of abatement and the circumstances in which compensation might be abated will be set out in the regulations themselves, which will be subject to consultation and affirmative resolution of both Houses. The existing provisions will be retained until the review has been completed and there has been consultation on any changes.

Amendment No. 2 and amendments Nos. 15 to 18 make consequential amendments to clause 20 and the repeals schedule, schedule 17. The amendments—which, as I have said, will enable our review to be implemented quickly—together with new clause 1 and amendment No. 1 on IDOs, represent a comprehensive package which shows the Government's commitment to raising environmental standards in the minerals industry. Taken together, they will ensure that there is a rigorous framework in place to enable all old minerals permissions to be brought up to an acceptable standard over the next decade. These are tough proposals, but I believe that they are in the long-term interests of the industry and local communities.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I think that we can agree that the Government are definitely moving in the right direction but, as the Minister will know from our debates in Committee, the Opposition are still convinced that more could be done to deal with this very serious problem.

The Government's proposals will clear up much of the confusion—even mystery—surrounding interim development orders and will enable mineral planning authorities to take steps to ensure that quarrying is carried out to higher standards. What is not, however, admitted, is that there are IDOs in connection with sites where quarrying ought not to take place at all. As a result, organisations such as the National Housing and Town Planning Council, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales have all said that the Government have missed an opportunity to put right the really damaging consequences of IDOs hastily given in the 1940s.

Even with the Government's current review of quarrying in the United Kingdom and even with the best possible interpretation of the outcome of the Government's efforts to deal with this problem, 18 months to two years will pass, during which serious damage will continue to take place on many sites of special scientific interest in the United Kingdom. As a result, the homes of thousands of people will continue to be blighted. Their worst fears about the threat of quarrying on their doorsteps will be confirmed. As IDOs are registered, even more people may be shocked to find out that they live in the middle, or on the edge, of a site where quarrying permission has been granted.

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

In addition to this blighting of people's homes right across the country, there is the issue of the damage being done to hundreds of valuable wildlife habitats. They are being destroyed now, they will continue to be destroyed, and a process of destruction will begin in new areas while the Government decline to act, perhaps giving some impression and hope that eventually they will deal with the problem in the way that is necessary.

The Government will be familiar with the report "Losing Ground", drawn up by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, which records that 17 sites of special scientific interest are threatened by IDO quarry workings, as well as three national nature reserves and an important wetland. They will know that across Britain, in a large number of counties, sites are threatened every day of the week. In Dyfed, there is the 90-acre Carmel woods site, a unique ancient Welsh woodland designated in 1989 as a site of special scientific interest. It has an IDO on it, and McAlpine is threatening to move on to the site. At Asham in Somerset, a 350-acre SSSI of grade 1 woodland is being destroyed. In Leicestershire, at Budden wood, Redland Aggregates has already destroyed most of the SSSI. I could go on to give a catalogue of valuable wildlife and nature habitats that are being destroyed while the Government consult and wonder what action they might take.

In addition to this destruction, there is also the matter of compensation, which is causing a great deal of vexation. Cheshire county council is in a difficult position over a wetland SSSI at Rixley clay pit. The council refused to give permission and faces a claim for £1·5 million compensation.

It is plain that mineral planning authorities, although they wish to preserve these special sites, simply cannot afford to pay the compensation demanded under existing legislation. It is no wonder that groups such as "Stop Quarrying Under Interim Development Orders", the Bacup moors action group—in the constituency of one of the Minister's ministerial colleagues—the Asham and East Mendip action group and the Somerset branch of the CPRE are concerned. Across the country people are making representations to the Government emphasising the need for changes.

4.45 pm

The Minister seemed to imply in his opening statement that we were perhaps precipitate in seeking an amendment to the Government's new clause that would allow proceedings to take place that would stop interim development orders going ahead without compensation. Although it is true that in some ways this is a new aspect of English law, in other ways it is not. If we look, for example, at improved standards of pollution control, we see that manufacturing companies often have to change their technology completely and invest huge amounts of money, or sometimes even close down altogether, because they cannot meet modern standards. They do not get any compensation when that happens. We are saying that, in certain specific circumstances, there is a case for arguing that, where a site does not meet modern environmental assessment standards, if the permission has not been taken up, it should be revoked; if it is an existing permission, an opportunity should be given to find out whether it can be worked properly: but there should be a time to stop.

Although this may be at least partially new in Britain, it is not a new concept in the European Community. This procedure has already taken place in Germany. I should like to read to the Minister a letter of 2 April this year from the German Economics Minister on the federal mining law, which was addressed to a Mr. Buxton in the United Kingdom. Mr. Buxton is involved in legal matters. The letter states:

"In answer to the question raised in your letter of 2nd April 1991, I inform you as follows:

In the Federal Republic of Germany there is no financial support on the part of the Government or other public institutions for mining concerns for the recently introduced environmental desirability check of plans. Neither do mining concerns received any compensation if a business plan is not permitted, by reason of the law whether or not it is for environmental points or other requirements. The same applies as regards the withdrawal of mining consents.

Section 18 of the Mining Law and other items foresee that consents and approvals are to be withdrawn if after the events facts appear which would have led to refusal."

So, if we acted, we would be doing something consonant with what already happens in other member states.

I appreciate that the Government are undertaking a consultation process at the moment. However, given the steps already taken, and if the Government recognise the seriousness of the damage being done to existing sites of special scientific interest and the blight already taking place on the homes of thousands of people, they should be prepared to act swiftly and accept our amendment.

Sir Neil Macfarlane (Sutton and Cheam): The Minister presented the amendments cogently, but I hope that he will clarify a few matters, bearing in mind that many of the points contained in the new clause and its related amendments are in some ways wholly unprecedented in planning legislation, and that causes some concern.

Although I missed my hon. Friend's opening remarks in introducing the new clause, he referred to the consultation process, which I believe he estimated would be completed by September, and later he referred to consultation in the middle of 1992. Will he set out the precise nature of that consultation, its timing, the people who will be consulted and how it will move through the Association of County Councils, mineral planning authorities and users? It is crucial to know that at this stage, and my hon. Friend may wish to answer by writing to me in the wider notion.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am raising some points on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who unfortunately cannot be here because she is serving on the Finance Bill Standing Committee. She has received a communication from a major employer in her constituency, and the Minister may have received representations from the National Federation of Clay Industries about the Government's proposals. A number of points have been raised and they must be clarified in view of the terms of the new clause. The company concerned is Steetley Building Products Limited, a major employer in my hon. Friend's constituency. Although it says, as do other members of the National Federation of Clay Industries, that it supports the principle of the registration of IDOs, it questions the time scale involved in the Government's proposals.

Under the Government's proposals, existing IDO permissions will be subject to potential restriction and the imposition of additional operating and restoration conditions without compensation. Does the Minister agree

that the proposals are contrary to established principles of planning law and are potentially damaging to the asset values of permission-holders? Under the current proposals, the holders of IDO permissions must apply for registration of them within six months of the commencement of the Bill's provisions. Does the Minister accept that the proposal allows insufficient time for holders and the authorities to deal properly with the registration of an anticipated 1,200 permissions?

Under the Government's proposals, appeal against the decision on the validity or extent of IDO permissions will be to the Secretary of State. Does the Minister agree that such an appeal is a legal, not a planning, matter and should be determined by the Lands Tribunal or other competent body? The Secretary of State will be unable to cope with the likely volume of appeals, bearing in mind the number of planning appeals that are currently outstanding.

Under the Government's proposals, the holders of IDO permissions must submit a scheme of operating and restoration conditions for approval by the mineral planning authority within 12 months of registration. Does the Minister accept that 12 months is too short a period, having regard to the time and resources required to submit such plans and the capacity of the mineral planning authority to deal properly with the anticipated work load?

Under the Government's proposals, operations at a site where there has been no working to any substantial extent for the last two years, ending on 1 May 1991—in other words, dormant sites—cannot recommence until the permission has been registered and a scheme for operating and restoring has been agreed with the mineral planning authority.

Does the Minister agree that the definition of "dormant sites" must exclude marginal sites, which may not have been fully exploited since 1989 due to the recession and because of the cyclical nature of the industry, but which might be required for full production at short notice when demand increases?

In other words, the company and the national federation is suggesting that a longer time scale is needed to enable the industry to comply with the requirements, which it believes are environmentally correct and which it supports but which it feels are being implemented too quickly. I hope that, in his reply, the Minister will say whether he either accepts those points or is prepared to meet the national federation to discuss the matters that have been raised.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I agreed with all that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said, and in view of the new clause and large number of associated amendments, I need not delay the House for long. A large number of homes in Sussex have been blighted by quarrying, many beautiful sites are being destroyed and the effect on wildlife is considerable. I do not detect in the Bill the strength of measures that we need to cope with those problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is also serving on the Finance Bill Standing Committee, has asked me to raise his concern lest the new clause will not deal with a local problem that his constituents face at Druridge bay. Hon. Members who know that area will appreciate that it has a magnificent six or seven-mile coastline of high sand dunes. Old planning permissions granted by Ministers on appeal in the 1960s mean that sand will continue to be extracted from the beach and dunes there for nigh on 50 years, with the risk of grave environmental damage.

Any attempt to buy out that permission by compensation would involve sums of money well beyond the resources of the community, because of the lack of limits on the sand that can be taken away. So the Bill will not be sufficient to deal with the problems that exist in Sussex and Northumberland. I hope that the Minister will at some stage consider beefing up his proposals.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I thought some months ago that I would have to delay the House for a considerable time on the issues that we are discussing, because I did not believe at that time that the Government would move on the points that a number of hon. Members then made, even though there were consultations. I did not expect the Government to introduce the type of amendments that are before us today.

I became involved in the subject in a considerable way about a year ago, having been approached by the Bacup moors action group in the constituency of the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, it being adjacent to my constituency. I was concerned with an issue being pursued by that body, by Janet Anderson, the prospective Labour candidate for that constituency, and by a number of people in my constituency who were fearful of what might happen in Hapton moor, which runs through that constituency into my constituency.

In October last year I visited the Britannia and Facit site,s in Rossendale, near Bacup. When I visited the site, I was told that the Minister had paid a visit to the area earlier in the day. I was absolutely horrified by the wanton destruction that I saw there, and I became convinced that speedy action had to be taken to deal with IDOs.

While, therefore, I support everything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), I applaud the Government for having tabled the new clause and its related amendments. Any further delay in taking action to deal with the problem would have represented a negation of duty in protecting the environment. Anyone who sees at first hand what has happened in some areas must be utterly dismayed. We accept the need for quarrying and the fact that aggregates must be made available, but we must do everything possible to protect the environment.

A problem that will be dealt with by the new clause was identified in a written answer that the then Minister, now the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, gave me in November, when he said:

> "No records of applications made under interim development orders were required and no information about the total number of permissions granted is currently available."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1990; Vol. 181, c. *43*.]

We did not even know about that issue. I pursued it not only with the Department of the Environment but with the county council. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend referred to the matter in Committee from material that I supplied to him. The county council had no records. One of the reasons why the records are inadequate is because of local government reorganisation. Many of the planning authorities that existed in the pre-planning days have now gone out of existence. Some of their records were pretty poor in the first place, but the records kept by some of the new bodies—the county councils that took over those responsibilities—vary considerably.

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend was right to move the amendment, but I am sure that the Minister will not accept it. I sincerely feel that the Bill is a tremendous improvement on the existing position and will be welcomed by people in many parts of the country who wish to avoid the devastation that has been taking place as a result of interim development orders.

5 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I wish to press the Minister on two problems in which I am particularly interested: sites where limestone pavements and limestone are taken for garden rockeries, and sites in parts of north Wales, where slate is extracted for fireplaces and patios.

Most of the sites are small. They are rarely worked on a full-time basis but often are worked for only a few weeks a year and sometimes only on Saturdays and Sundays. On many occasions, much damage is caused to the environment. The problem is that local people object to a site being worked and, when they inquire, they are told that those who are working the site have permission, so they do not pursue the matter further.

Although the new clause should cover such sites, how will the general public know that people will no longer be allowed to extract minerals from small sites in that historic way? How will they now be able to take action to get such extraction stopped? What advice will be given to people who live close to small quarrying sites and who, over the years, have suffered the nuisance and the environmental damage caused by them, so that they will know that those traditional works should not be continued?

There will inevitably be continuing and increasing problems for planning in a conflict between the need to extract minerals and the need to preserve our countryside. What are the Government doing to reduce that conflict by considering the use of recycling materials, especially for road construction, to ensure that we dramatically reduce the demand for such minerals?

Sir George Young: The debate on new clause 1 has been helpful. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) might have been more forthcoming in welcoming the Government's action. Even the Council for the Protection of Rural England said in a circular:

> "The CPRE welcomes the positive approach taken by the Government to reducing the problems associated with interim development orders."

It is true that the CPRE would have liked us to go even further. The Association of County Councils said:

> "We are especially pleased that the Secretary of State has addressed this important issue, by means of New Clause 1 and the associated Schedules and amendments."

It is worth putting it on record that IDOs have been around since just after the second world war and the Government have grasped the nettle and dealt with them after too long a period. We have instituted a review of planning permissions granted in the 1950s and 1960s, which also featured in our debates.

In answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), any extraction of aggregates will now have to be covered by planning permission and must be entered on the planning register. I do not know, from what he told the House, whether that extraction takes place under IDOs or whether such works are already in the planning regime. Once the provisions of new clause 1 are up and running, any member of the public will be able to look at the planning register and see whether planning consent was granted. People will also be able to see what conditions have been attached to the working of a particular quarry.

The hon. Gentleman also asked how one could reduce demand for aggregates by, for example, recycling. A debate will take place later to deal specifically with that issue and the demand for aggregates and the potential conflict with the environment. My hon. Friend who will answer that debate will give a full response on how we address those broader issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Sir N. Macfarlane) asked several questions. There will be two consultation exercises. The first will be on the guidance that we shall give to the mineral planning authorities on the working conditions that we should like introduced to deal with the IDOs. We shall consult them before we make our guidelines available. We want to get on with that quickly. The second consultation exercise will be next year on the review of the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981. That is a broader review of the regime covering consents in the 1950s and 1960s. We shall consult with the industry, landowners and mineral planning authorities long before we lay down regulations, which will be subject to affirmative resolutions in both Houses of Parliament. The consultation will take place next year.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On new clause 8, will the Minister confirm that identical consultations will take place in Scotland with interested parties? I ask that because quarrying activity taking place in Perthshire, at a site which is closely associated with Shakespeare's Macbeth, is causing much concern to local people and to Scots in general. I hope that the Minister has sought an assurance from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland on that quarrying activity.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman may have seen that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland was nodding vigorously. The Bill provides for Scotland in terms equivalent to those that apply to England and Wales. My hon. Friend will write to planning authorities and people in the minerals industry in Scotland to inform them of the action that we are debating this afternoon. A further and more detailed survey will also be conducted to try to improve some of the information available on IDOs in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has been actively involved in the debate in my Department and has a detailed knowledge of the conditions in Rossendale. As a constituency Member, he warmly welcomes the provisions of new clause 1.

We welcome the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) back to our debates. He made an appearance earlier in the Standing Committee, but we were denied the benefit of his help for the rest of the proceedings. There was an Adjournment debate on Druridge bay about four months ago to which the Under-Secretary of State—my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo)—responded. The broader review of the 1981 Act will embrace the conditions and problems that he described.

In answer to the hon. Member for Leicester (Mr. Vaz), we have consulted the industry and the mineral planning authorities on the time scale and, as a result of

representations, we lengthened the time scale and introduced flexibility. I am confident that the mineral planning authorities can now cope. If there is a local problem, those authorities have the discretion to extend the period beyond 12 months if they feel that more time is needed for applications in their areas.

I agreed with the comments of the hon. Member for Bridgend. Parliament is for ever driving up standards of health and environmental protection. We do not give compensation to factories when we impose higher standards of safety. That is why it would be wholly unreasonable to provide compensation when we try to improve environmental conditions in the minerals industry. However, we do not go as far as the hon. Gentleman on the expropriation of assets. There may be parallels on the continent, but we shall not pursue them here. As for people who find that they have bought property close to an IDO, once IDOs are registered with the mineral planning authority, they should appear on that register within two weeks. Therefore, in future, a search should throw up the existence of an IDO.

I think that I have dealt with all the points raised—if not, I promise to write to those hon. Members who have raised issues that have not been addressed. I hope that the House will agree that we can accept all the Government's new clauses, but I cannot advise the House to accept amendment (a) in the name of Opposition Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 2

Demolition of buildings

'.—(1) In section 55 of the principal Act (meaning of "development") after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) For the purposes of this Act "building operations" includes—

(a) demolition of buildings;

(b) rebuilding;

(c) structural alterations of or additions to buildings; and

(d) other operations normally undertaken by a person carrying on business as a builder."

(2) In subsection (2) of that section after paragraph (f) there is inserted—

"(g) the demolition of any description of building specified in a direction given by the Secretary of State to local planning authorities generally or to a particular local planning authority."

(3) After section 108(3) of that Act (compensation for refusal or conditional grant of planning permission formerly granted by development order) there is inserted—

"(4) Regulations made by virtue of this subsection may provide that subsection (1) shall not apply where planning permission granted by a development order for demolition of buildings or any description of buildings is withdrawn by the issue of directions under powers conferred by the order.'" —*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I beg to move, that the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the following: Government new clause 6—*Demolition of buildings.*

Government Amendment Nos. 42 to 45, 64 to 67, 54 and 78, 35, 79, 59, 32 to 34, 38 to 41, 46 to 49, 51 to 53, 56 to 58, 81 to 85, 87 to 90, 92 to 94, 36, 50, 55, 60, 37, 100, 102 and 103.

5.15 pm

Mr. Yeo: We have listened carefully to the arguments in the debates on demolition that have taken place in both Houses during the passage of the Bill. We have also taken account of the support for the legislation in the responses to our public consultation paper on demolition last year. We have considered the High Court's decision in January this year, in the case of Cambridge city council *v.* Secretary of State for the Environment and Milton Park Investment Ltd., which held that the demolition of certain semi-detached houses was development.

Amendments were withdrawn in Standing Committee when my hon. Friend the Minister of State promised consultations within Whitehall and a further statement on Report. We have now concluded that the time is right to introduce selective controls on demolition. In reaching that conclusion, I pay tribute to the arguments adduced by hon. Members, in particular to the advocacy of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who cannot be here today but has been a vigorous and persuasive supporter of the changes. I believe that it was in his constituency that one half of a semi-detached house was demolished without permission. It was that kind of unacceptable and absurd incident that convinced us of the need to extend planning control to cover demolition.

The amendments may look complicated, but they represent the best way forward. Subsection (1) of the new clause brings the demolition of all building within the meaning of building operations and hence within the definition of development. The new clause also provides a direction-making power to enable the Secretary of State to direct that the demolition of any specified type of building does not involve development. That power will be used to exclude from planning control the demolition of all buildings that are not dwelling houses.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): What will trigger the action that my hon. Friend has just outlined?

Mr. Yeo: Once the Bill has passed on to the statute book, the Secretary of State will use the direction-making power and issue a direction to that effect. In our judgment, the demolition of non-dwelling houses has, on the whole, not presented the same kind of difficulties as the demolition of dwelling houses. Generally, people do not demolish office blocks or industrial premises unless they already have permission to do something else with the site.

Dr. Godman: While I accept what the Minister says about non-residential buildings, there is often a problem with industrial buildings which might well be listed. In my constituency, Gourock ropeworks is a listed building which is literally falling apart and, for understandable reasons, the local authority might seek to demolish it. The proposed demolition of some industrial buildings can cause considerable controversy in local communities.

Mr. Yeo: Listed buildings are already subject to control; there is already a restriction on anyone who wants to demolish a listed building. A local authority which wanted to do so would have to undertake the necessary procedures to obtain permission. Anyone who wants to

[Mr. Yeo]

demolish a listed building, whether industrial or any other type, must follow procedures which are already quite restrictive.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I wish to make an innocent inquiry about whether the new provisions will deal with the following practical and recent example. The building next to the former Department of Health and Social Security offices at the Elephant and Castle, which is still used for offices, but not for Ministers' offices, was a listed office building. Apparently, it was of great significance in terms of 1930s architecture, although I did not find it as beautiful as other people did. It was knocked down after it had been identified as important and the request for its listing had been made. I have not had a chance to check, but I believe that listing was imminent. Certainly it was known that it was ready to be listed. Will that sort of building be protected after the changes have been made to this legislation?

Mr. Yeo: Not if the buildings are non-dwelling houses and unlisted. The protection available for listed buildings continues and will be unchanged by the new clause. I share the hon. Gentleman's view that some of the listings that have taken place have been somewhat eccentric. I do not think that the new clause is intended to address the problem to which the hon. Gentleman referred—demolition taking place when listing is imminent. That is a separate problem which would need a different solution.

The new clause deals with another problem related to dwelling houses. A detached house in a substantial plot in a suburban location could, at present, be demolished without permission and there could then be an application for planning permission for four or five houses on the same plot, thus producing an increase in the land value. I take note of the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister and hope that he will address the issues in its widest form. If a formal request for listed building status has been submitted and been considered by the relevant authority, whether local authority or Government, we need proper protection so that people cannot come and knock down a building literally the day before it obtains listed building status. The whole issue of whether it would have gained listed status then becomes theoretical. The legislation should contain the principle to ensure that a developer or anyone else who knocks down a building which may be of important architectural significance—whether residential, commercial or industrial—is penalised pretty hard.

Mr. Yeo: Assuming that the new clause is accepted, any residential building will, in future, be capable of being protected. I acknowledge that a problem may still exist with non-residential buildings. It is not possible for us to deal with that problem during the passage of the Bill, but I recognise that there is, at least potentially, a problem. I shall reflect on that and write to the hon. Gentleman about it.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will my hon. Friend reflect on the fact that some dwelling houses are attached to offices and industrial buildings, particularly in older districts, and perhaps more often in the north than the south—certainly in parts of my constituency. Those buildings are not necessarily in conservation areas and I would not like my hon. Friend's exemptions to allow circumstances in which someone's home could be attached to something one day and next to a gap site the next. Will my hon. Friend look at that aspect of the proposed exemptions to ensure that such a problem will not arise?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. Before the Secretary of State makes a direction under the direction-making power, I will look at the matter to see whether there is a way to give the same protection to someone who lives in a semi-detached house adjacent to an office as to someone living in a semi-detached house adjacent to a dwelling house. We should examine that point sympathetically.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the situation that arose in Salcombe, Devon, could not happen again under the proposed legislation? In Salcombe, a lovely Victorian villa was on the point of being demolished because a developer had bought the land on which the villa was situated and realised that he could build a block of flats there. But for the fact that the local community got wind of the developer's plans, he could and would have knocked down the villa. Fortunately, the local authority, with the help of the Department of the Environment, managed to extend the conservation area to include the house.

It is not right to have to extend conservation areas to save buildings, as we shall end up with conservation areas all over the place where they should not be. Will my hon. Friend say something about people coming along and knocking down houses overnight which, under the new clause, will not be a criminal offence unless the building is listed or there is a tree on the land on which there is a tree preservation order?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is such a vigorous champion and exponent of tighter planning controls that I am amazed that anyone west of Bristol should dream of undertaking anything which might approach a breach of planning control. I can assure him that the new clause will deal directly with the circumstances to which he referred. It is intended to tackle precisely that situation.

We shall propose amendments to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 to grant permitted development rights for the demolition of houses in most circumstances. That will reflect the fact that most demolitions are uncontroversial, but it would be possible to control the most damaging cases by excluding the demolition of semi-detached and terraced houses from permitted development rights.

The amendments to the general development order will be subject to public consultation. I cannot say at this stage exactly what those amendments will be, but our aim is to implement the measure as soon as possible. Of course, the consultation process will give us the chance to consider carefully the points that have been made today.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Can the Minister explain how the measure will be given teeth because, by definition, it is quicker to knock something down than to build it? Does not the case for such control demonstrate the need for criminal penalties if people do not conform to the new planning controls? What penalties will be applied to people who demolish buildings despite the new controls?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend may be attempting to introduce into our proceedings a discussion of the principle of criminalisation, with which the amendments and new clauses that have been called do not deal. I can assure my hon. Friend that, if a building or house is demolished in breach of planning control, the local authority will be able to enforce the construction of a replacement building as similar as possible to that which was demolished. Such a building must comply with building regulations and the relevant enforcement notice. That power should act as a strong deterrent to the speculative demolition which has caused concern.

I believe that if the owner of a house demolished it on spec, as it were, and then found that he faced a £100,000, £200,000 or £500,000 bill for reconstruction, that would represent a real deterrent, perhaps greater in financial terms than that envisaged by the advocates of criminalisation. The powers that we are now introducing will be an effective deterrent to such a problem which, although real, is not enormously widespread.

As a result of the amendments, it will for the first time be open to planning authorities to use article 4 directions to prevent the demolition of houses where the authorities see a particular risk or in areas that they regard as vulnerable to damage from speculative demolition. Demolition in conservation areas is already subject to control, but there may be other areas in which greater planning control is desirable. While it would not usually be appropriate to control the whole of a district, we should be prepared to consider sympathetically article 4 directions served on particular buildings or streets where there was a case for extending control for more than six months.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I imagine that article 4 directions are likely to be used on older buildings and those which are, in that sense, of more intrinsic value to the community. I was with the Minister up to the point where he said that any replacement that could be enforced would be required to conform to building regulations. The problem is that many wonderful old buildings, which are perhaps not in conservation areas and are not listed, get some of their charm from the fact that they do not conform to building regulations. What will happen if a replacement that meets that requirement is sufficiently ugly not to be a decent replacement?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend poses a fascinating question, but such detail will properly be dealt with in the consultation process that I mentioned a moment ago. It is not appropriate to use the valuable time of the House to discuss it any more specifically than that. It should be possible for common sense to prevail. The local authority will be able to enforce the construction of a replacement building. It must be as similar as possible to the demolished building, but it must comply with building regulations. As my hon. Friend said, it is possible that, in some cases, those objectives may be incompatible, but there is a common-sense solution. Above all, the purpose of the measure is to provide a deterrent to people who demolish buildings on spec. It will be an effective deterrent and I should be surprised if there were many instances such as those to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I am concerned that the Minister is a little too sanguine in his reply. In some areas, especially in the west country, where land values are high and property is extremely valuable, fly-by-night merchants and cowboys are prepared to indulge in speculative demolition. What the Minister says about the local authority being a substantial deterrent is not the case, especially when enforcement officers are hard pressed. My constituency has the fifth or sixth highest volume of planning applications in the country. The officers cannot get around all the sites to enforce the regulations. Because of the high land values, there is a great incentive—greater than the deterrent, I fear—to indulge in such practices which the Minister is apparently seeking to shrug off. The only solution is not a fanciful deterrent, but criminalisation.

Mr. Yeo: I am tempted to go with the debate on criminalisation which was won comprehensively by the Government, who dispatched the advocates of criminalisation in all directions with some help from the Opposition. Although I am tempted to rehearse the arguments again, my hon. Friend is missing the point. Of course there is a significant temptation for people to indulge in what we could call speculative demolition. At present, there is everything to be gained and nothing much to be lost from creating a vacant site where there was previously a dwelling, and there is probably a good chance of getting planning permission for something that might be more valuable.

In the future, people will still have to get planning permission but, once they have made their application, it will be apparent to the local authority—whether its enforcement officers are hard pressed or not—that a breach of planning control has taken place and the speculative demolisher will face an enourmous bill to reconstruct the dwelling that was previously on that site. Therefore, when the new clause has been accepted, the problems will not be nearly so serious as some of my hon. Friends seem to fear.

Mr. Steen: I represent about a third of Torbay so I know what my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) is talking about. Is the Minister saying that under the new clause, if a developer knocked down a house he could be asked to rebuild it, but that he could then knock it down, having obtained planning permission to build something else?

Mr. Yeo: It would certainly be a step-by-step process. My hon. Friend is right to say that if someone knocks down a house without the necessary planning permission, the local authority has the power to make him reconstruct that house at great expense. If he subsequently wishes to apply for planning permission to do something else on that site, he would be free to do so, as anyone owning land or a building is free to do.

The amendments allow local planning authorities to control the worst excesses of demolition of dwelling houses without imposing any extra demand, in the majority of cases, on the developer or the local planning authorities. New clause 6 and amendments Nos. 64 to 67, Nos. 78 and 79, Nos. 81 to 85, Nos. 87 to 90, Nos. 92 to 94, No. 100, and Nos. 102 and 103 make similar provisions for Scotland by amending section 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 and by making equivalent consequential provisions. I commend the new clause to the House.

5.30 pm

Sir Anthony Durant: I represent in the House the National Federation of Demolition Contractors. It may help the House if another point of view is expressed. I must make it clear that the federation is a responsible body. It has high training standards and believes in conforming to the law. It accepts that there are demolition men who do not conform to the federation's high standards on training, on working with the unions and on doing all the right things. It is accepted that there are some cowboys. In general, the federation is not against the proposals, although it is concerned about them.

One concern is that there may be delay. A building may be ready for demolition, but it could be a long and drawn-out process before the demolition contractor gets permission to demolish. The federation is concerned about that because with the downturn in the economy, especially in the south, there is a lack of work.

The federation has asked me to raise the issue of dangerous buildings, which has already been touched on by Opposition Members. Sometimes a building is in such a bad state that the only safe thing to do is to demolish it. Is such a demolition badly affected by the new clause and amendments? The federation would like to know the Minister's views.

The federation is not against the thrust of the Bill and it understands that it has to conform to the law. Members of the federation would much prefer to work on a site when demolition has already been approved than be stopped half way through. They are not keen for such a situation to arise. The federation behaves in a responsible manner, and its only anxieties concern delay and dangerous buildings. I shall be interested to hear the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Peter Thurnham: (Bolton, North-East): I did not have the pleasure of serving on the Committee, but I think that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of a particular constituency problem. I hope that he will advise me whether the new clause and amendments will be helpful in this case, which is different from those raised in the debate so far. The residents would like demolition to occur, but the developer of the site is refusing to carry out demolition. It is a long-standing problem. The Harwood shopping precinct, which was built 25 years ago, has now been turned into a ghetto and the residents want it demolished, but the owner, who has planning permission to redevelop the site, has failed to do so and is dragging his feet. The council has failed to force him to do so and everyone is concerned.

I tabled new clause 4 to help solve the problem, but it has not been selected. Will the new clause or amendments help, or are there sufficient powers in existence to enable the council to take action against the developer and to force him to redevelop, or to enable the council compulsorily to purchase the site and sell it to another developer who will do so?

I received a letter today from Mrs. Sheila Turner, a constituent who lives near the precinct. She writes:

"I am extremely concerned at the state of the precinct and the fact that Mr. Horrocks"—

the developer concerned—

"is thumbing his nose at the people of Harwood and being allowed to get away with it."

The problem has persisted since 1984 and all the residents in the area are thoroughly fed up.

Mrs. Turner continues:

"Can nothing be done to force him to demolish the buildings? I moved here 30 years ago into a house built by Mr. Horrocks' firm on New Heys Way. He was a familiar figure, striding along New Heys Way, watching his investment grow. Now that he has allowed the precinct to deteriorate to such an extent that it would not be out of place in an inner city deprived area (complete with yobs) he is constantly 'unavailable' like some prima donna.

I have written to Mr. Horrocks challenging him to take his grandchildren on a walk through the crumbling, disgusting, obscene grafitti daubed wreck and I hope he will feel the shame and embarrassment that the Harwood residents feel every day . . . It is not a very happy situation for Harwood residents."

Mrs. Turner has written to the council about the matter. The council has been absolutely feeble and pathetic. It has said that it is unable to do anything and it has tried to shift the blame on to the Government. The council said:

"Central Government's view would be that the site is in private ownership and its existing planning permissions have been granted and it is up to the private sector, and Mr. Horrocks in particular, to achieve the necessary re-development."

The residents feel that the council should act. Are the new clause and amendments relevant to the problem, or does section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 give the council sufficient power to act now compulsorily to acquire the land? Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell me whether the spirit and principle of the 1990 Act give the council the scope to exercise power of acquisition in a way that harnesses the resources and skills of a private developer in putting the site to effective use?

I have already shown my hon. Friend a cutting from the *Bolton Evening News* this week in which Mr. Earp, of Tonge Moor road, Bolton, says that I am the only person who is trying to do anything about the problem. Does the council have enough power to act? Does my hon. Friend feel that it should act? My hon. Friend is aware that all this week an enormous court case has gone on in the Strand, which was reported in the *Bolton Evening News* this week. Bolton council is in trouble for failing to enforce its powers with regard to a covenant. The residents want Barratt to demolish 10 houses that were built on land in contravention of a covenant that stated that there should be no building.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend agree that the ability and power of a local authority to act on enforcement notices is the key to all these matters? At present, local authorities, after the experience on Sunday trading, are reluctant to get involved in lengthy court proceedings which are enormously expensive and which will add an enormous burden to community charge or council taxpayers. Does my hon. Friend agree that the solution is not necessarily to provide powers for local authorities but to ensure that local authorities are willing to enforce the powers that they already have?

Mr. Thurnham: Indeed. It is no good for councillors to let themselves be walked over by developers. In some cases, there may be some political connotations. Councils may refuse to do their duty in certain areas because, for political reasons, they think that it may be wise to let the residents become unhappy. I am concerned about Bolton council's feebleness in such cases. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether there are

sufficient powers already or whether there is a need for further legislation. If there are sufficient powers, why cannot the council use them?

Mr. Steen: It would be churlish of me not to congratulate the Government on moving some way towards meeting the robust arguments that I and other hon. Friends put in Committee, where I was privileged to serve. The Government wanted the Bill to complete its Committee stage in a day and to be seen as a little tidying-up measure. They wanted it then to be nodded through the House on the day of the Monmouth by-election. The Government chose a good day on which there might be as few hon. Members present as possible. However, in Committee the Government realised that the Bill was important, and that Conservative and Opposition Members saw it as the greatest opportunity for 20 years to put right some of the planning injustices. Unfortunately, the Government tried to make it a tidy Bill and they have been resistant to the idea of extending the Bill to deal with other injustices.

In Committee, I raised on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) the question of demolition. I want to pay tribute to the Government for listening to Conservative Members and for recognising that something needed to be done. I hope that there will be other moves this evening from the Government. I hope that they will be prepared to extend the Bill from being a tidy little measure into a more serious and important Bill which will put right some of the injustices of the planning system.

We have tried to make it more difficult for certain categories of building to be demolished. I am fearful that local authorities could use the Bill as an opportunity to slow down the planning process. I am concerned that, if a building is to be demolished, the developers should not have the additional cost of delay, which is one of the problems of our planning system. I am told that in France and Germany proper compensation is paid and things get done as a result. I hope that that is one problem which the Bill will redress.

My hon. Friend the Minister could also usefully say something about the consultation process. Will that last for months, or will it be completed by the end of July, so that by September or October the demolition clause will be in place?

Mr. Moate: Alas, I did not have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee, but I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has just said. This is a serious and important Bill and the Government should be warmly congratulated on a number of its provisions, including new clause 2. I congratulate them on having endeavoured to close a gap that has caused much concern over the years. It is right that demolition should be brought within the scope of planning control. I hope that we do not do any damage to the legitimate interests represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir T. Durant).

I fear that once again we are giving duties to local planning authorities without giving them adequate powers of enforcement. We are raising expectations while still allowing those who abuse the law the opportunity to continue doing so. That point follows one dealt with in a number of interventions to which my hon. Friend courteously responded but with which he did not deal satisfactorily.

The law-abiding citizen has seldom posed a problem. In future, the law-abiding citizen will know that he has to obtain planning permission in order to demolish a dwelling house and the planning authority will have the power of enforcement. But the non-law-abiding citizen will pose a problem. If a house on a large site is demolished without planning permission—to quote the classic example of a large decaying villa on a large site—the person responsible could be required to rebuild it. But the practical consequence is that it is not logical to rebuild a large villa on such a site. In the end, logic will prevail and the planning authority will tell the cowboy that it obviously makes sense to put up a number of smaller homes on that site. In the end, the spec developer will win.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know that even where houses have been built without planning permission—we can all think of such examples—there are few instances where such unlawful buildings are demolished because in the end it would be illogical to do so. Therefore, unfortunately, in such cases the developer will always win.

I accept that, as has been said, that leads back to criminalisation. The only way in which the measure can be given teeth is to have some criminal penalties. I suspect that that has been argued through. There are strong arguments for and against that, but at some stage specific penalties have to be imposed to deal with someone who wantonly and flagrantly disobeys planning laws. I welcome the control over demolition, but it is a fairly toothless proposal which will present many planning authorities with problems, not solutions.

Mr. Allason: My concern about new clause 2 is that it does not cover the difficulties experienced in the south-west. A few moments ago I mentioned high property values. South Devon has experienced numerous examples of appalling abuses of planning regulations. In my constituency there is a major controversy relating to the improvement or development, call it what one will, of the Cockington valley preservation area. On the fringes of that site there has been a long battle over where the boundaries are to be drawn. We have had classic examples of a footpath going straight through the living room of a house that has never been occupied because a mistake was made in drawing the boundaries. In no case, as far as I am aware, has an order been made for the demolition of such properties, which have been put up quickly by speculative builders. Often, when there is a threat of enforcement, the dwelling will be occupied, probably more quickly than usual, in order to get through another loophole.

5.45 pm

I am sure that a substantial proportion of hon. Members' mail is dominated by planning issues which are not our direct responsibility. However, we should be prepared to shoulder the burden of responsibility for planning regulations for the next 20 years. The past 20 years have identified numerous loopholes that have been exploited by the unscrupulous. We have an opportunity this evening to close some of those loopholes.

A moment ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) mentioned giving those responsibilities to local authorities without giving them the power of enforcement. The House has a tendency to give

important responsibilities to local authorities without contemplating the costs involved or providing them with the resources necessary. I have already mentioned the cost of enforcement, but there are insufficient officers in the planning departments, certainly in Torbay, rigorously to enforce the existing regulations. Numerous other flaws have been exploited over the years. My great concern has always been development on green field sites, but in my constituency there are very few green field sites left because unscrupulous developers have concreted over every blade of grass around.

Enforcement is the key. The Minister has strong faith in local authorities' ability to enforce demolition orders where there has been improper development, but can he cite cases where such enforcement orders have been enforced? In my recollection, there have been few and invariably they have involved lengthy legal proceedings. At the end of the day the developer has only rarely been required to demolish a property that has been put up in contravention of the regulations.

I hope that my hon. Friend will consider this evening that he is not just pushing a Bill through the House of Commons; he will be affecting the lives of millions of people throughout Britain who will have to live with this legislation for many years to come. There is a tendancy known as NIMBY—not in my back yard. We have an opportunity now to legislate for the future in order to ensure that some of the loopholes that have been so blatently exploited in the past are finally closed.

I beg my hon. Friend to consider carefully what I have said. When the moment comes for him to retire to south Devon where I will welcome him as my constituent, he will not want unscrupulous developers building close to his retirement home.

Mr. Wilshire: I imagine that in Committee it became clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that I am not an enthusiast for extending the powers of planning committees over the lives of individuals. I have said on a number of occasions that I have reservations about the wisdom of bringing demolition within the remit of planning control, and I still do.

I say that against the background of my constituency being one of many with the sorts of problems that were discussed in Committee and which have been mentioned again today. The particular problem that my constituency seems to share with a number of others is the enthusiastic speculative developer who knocks down a large house and then negotiates on density afterwards. I am well aware of the consequences that that can have. Therefore, although I have reservations about the proposed approach, I keep an open mind.

I have throughout been against a blanket requirement, in all circumstances, for any demolition to be subject to planning permission. The suggested change to the general development order as a means of ensuring that blanket prohibition is not the order of the day offers a very neat solution, and one that commends itself to me.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not succumb to the temptation to allow many councils to withdraw permitted development rights—or in this case, permitted demolition rights—across large swathes of a local authority's area. That would be to fly in the face of the measure, which is meant to give protection where it is needed without taking away individual rights.

Mention has been made of the possible slowing down in the planning process that could occur. In Committee, I commended to my hon. Friend the Minister a change in the law that would make a deemed approval the order of the day if, after 12 weeks, a decision had not been taken. In the case of an application to demolish, it would not be unreasonable to expect any planning authority, under all circumstances, to reach a decision within that period of time. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will consider whether a deemed approval could be a way of avoiding delay.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) referred to dangerous buildings. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will make it crystal clear to planning authorities, inspectors, and courts if necessary, that the requirement to safeguard public safety would be adequate justification for not necessarily waiting for a decision in the case of a building that was structurally dangerous.

Replying to my intervention earlier, my hon. Friend the Minister said that a case could be made for leaving certain details to the common sense of the people involved. I implore him not to place too much store by common sense in the planning process. I chaired a planning committee for five years, and my experience of planning officers is that, often, they are not noted for displaying common sense in their approach to such issues—and I have yet to meet a developer who displays common sense when profit is dangled before him. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to tie up all the details, to make it clear what is meant by the provision and by the general development order. Despite my reservations, I believe that the overall solution is neat, and I shall take great pleasure in supporting it.

Dr. Godman: In speaking in support of new clause 6, I make no apology for touching briefly on a constituency matter. If one drives into my constituency from the east, along the River Clyde, one first sees the remarkably conserved Newark castle. Its superb condition is a tribute to successive administrations at the Scottish Office, Labour and Conservative, and to others involved in the conservation of Scotland's ancient buildings. Alongside that landmark, as the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland knows, is the busy, bustling little Ferguson shipyard.

The juxtaposition of that ancient castle and the shipyard is easy on the eye. However, just 50 or 80 yards further into my constituency is the most appalling, squalid, derelict and decaying cluster of buildings, which include the Gourock road works.

I acknowledge that that site represents a fine example of 19th century Scottish industrial architecture, and that alongside it are two Georgian houses. In an earlier intervention, the Minister pointed out that if those properties are listed buildings, action can be taken to protect them. However, that is an extremely long-winded process, and I regret that new clause 6 will be unable to deal with the circumstances in which my constituents find themselves.

Port Glasgow is ravaged by high unemployment. It is seeking to persuade industrialists, through the Locate in Scotland Bureau, to locate their operations there. However, if Japanese, American or Scandinavian business men drive into Port Glasgow, after they have been greeted by the agreeable vista of Newark castle they will be confronted by the Gourock road works. If that site and the

buildings alongside it can be conserved, that should be done, but it is unfair to place on the people of Port Glasgow the burden of living with that distressing squalor. New clause 6 will not allow Inverclyde district council to deal with that problem expeditiously.

I mentioned that the buildings concerned might be conserved rather than abolished. The Scottish Office published a fine book on old buildings, which has a foreword by the former Secretary of State for Scotland, now the Secretary of State for Transport, in which he argued the case for conservation. However, despite the commitment that I have to preserving Scotland's historical architecture, both industrial and aristocratic, I believe that the moment has arrived for decisive action in respect of the appalling squalor of the Gourock road works and the adjoining buildings.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that representatives of his district council met me some time ago for a detailed discussion of the case to which he refers, and to ascertain whether the serving of a repairs notice on the property owner in question would be a good way forward. I undertake to give the hon. Gentleman a written account of the situation to date. We all share his interest in finding a way forward, bearing in mind the importance to industry and to the local community of a favourable decision being reached.

Dr. Godman: I am deeply grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for displaying his characteristic courtesy in that intervention. The councillors and officials who met him told me that he gave their case a fair-minded and courteous hearing, and I am pleased to learn of his continuing concern. The situation that I have described is a blight on the residents of Port Glasgow and could deter people from setting up homes and industries on the lower Clyde. There is no waterway in the whole of the United Kingdom more beautiful than the firth of Clyde. It is a disgrace, and a continuing scandal, that such squalor should be allowed to remain literally on its banks. I repeat my thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for his gracious intervention, and I repeat that something must be done in the near future about the situation of which I have spoken.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The best that I can say is that the Opposition give the new clause a low-key welcome. Let me add, however, that I greatly enjoy these debates; I am always impressed by the way in which right-wing Members from the south of England, confronted by the developers, suddenly abandon their commitment to Thatcherism and move so far to the left that they bypass democratic socialism and cross straight into authoritarian eastern European communism—of the old style, that is. They want to criminalise all the developers. Conservative Members such as the hon. Members for Torbay (Mr. Allason) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) want to create a criminal offence—or perhaps that does not apply to the hon. Member for Spelthorne.

Mr. Wilshire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for correcting himself before I had a chance to correct him. I am not in favour of criminalisation.

6 pm

Mr. Soley: I know that this does not relate to the substance of the debate, but it is important. I think that the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) inclined towards the idea of criminalisation. It is not the answer; the answer is enforcement. The hon. Member for Torbay mentioned this.

Criminalisation is not the answer for three reasons. First, it does not deter; secondly, it is not necessarily any quicker; thirdly, it is not a particularly effective method. Enforcement, however, means that the developer must put right what he has done wrong, and it is therefore more effective. The distinction is important, although I do not want us to engage in the "criminalisation" debate all over again. I understand the force of the argument about irreversible development; indeed, I have put that argument myself. In such circumstances, a developer would be unable to put right what had been done wrong. In other circumstances, however, the most effective deterrent will be the power of enforcement. It is criticisms of that kind that get the Government into difficulties with their Back Benchers when new clauses such as this are being debated.

Another problem is the way in which the Government legislate. I agree that something must be done about demolition, and that it must be covered by the planning rules. The Government, however, tend to favour secondary legislation, thus placing the Minister in a difficult position. He cannot answer his Back Benchers who present him with various types of case—not just specific cases—because the legislation is not spelt out in the detail that would enable us to know exactly what the law is. If I were asked to identify the main criticism of the Government's planning machinery, I would cite the lack of certainty.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): Throughout the relevant period, the law has been represented by the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 —until the passing of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. I am at a loss to know what changes in the law the hon. Gentleman means.

Mr. Soley: I am referring generally to the planning legislation introduced by the present Government. When legislating on planning and the issues surrounding it, they have tended to give the Secretary of State power to intervene. They have done the same in regard to affordable housing. It is a secondary power, rather than a clear power.

I should place on record my admiration for the courage of the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant). Surrounded by colleagues all of whom were berating the demolition industry, the hon. Gentleman simply stood up and said, "I represent, and speak for, the demolition industry." That must have been rather like walking into St. Paul's cathedral and saying, "I speak for Satan"—or, worse still, walking into St. Paul's cathedral without paying the entry fee, which I suspect is now an even worse crime.

There is a problem for the demolition industry; again, the problem is one of certainty. The industry has not consulted me, but I would guess that its representatives have complained to the hon. Member for Reading, West that they do not know where they stand. That is the problem which confronts the Minister. In my view, the legislation should have spelt matters out more clearly; the

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Government have relied less on guidance and secondary legislation. That would have introduced a little more certainty into the planning system, benefiting both local authority planners, who must make the decisions, and the demolition industry itself.

Having said that, I should add that I have no doubt that the measure represents a necessary part of the Bill in its present form. Although I do not like this type of legislation, I support its implications and the direction in which it is aimed.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I rarely speak in environment debates. Before the Whips rush off to sound the alarm bells, let me assure my hon. Friends that I have no intention of moving an amendment to the Bill. I had intended to speak later about enforcement, but, as the subject has arisen during our current debate, it may be more convenient for me to say now what little I have to say.

I agree with the Government that it would have been wrong to criminalise the enforcement process, although I well understand the reasons given by some of my hon. Friends. We are looking for a deterrent. I have a suggestion which I hope the Government will consider and, if they deem it sensible, will introduce in another place.

On so many occasions, development companies or individuals flout the planning laws and do something that they know they should not be doing. They may, for instance, put a caravan in a field, knowing perfectly well that such an action requires permission. They hope that, by extending the enforcement process—by appealing, and using various delaying mechanisms—they will be able to leave the caravan there for a long time. With any luck, they will be allowed, if they are persistent enough, to continue to do what they have already done illegally.

Although I do not think that that should become a crime, I believe that the Bill would provide a deterrent if it provided that no council should be able to consider allowing planning permission to someone who had breached the planning law until he had stopped doing so. That would mean that no retrospective application for a caravan to be allowed to remain on a field—or a barn that had not been erected for agricultural purposes—could be even considered until the object in question had been removed.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): I have considerable sympathy with what my hon. Friend is saying. However, I was involved in such a case. It lasted for six years, and goodness knows how many letters were written to the Department. The trouble was that the ownership of the caravan changed every other week. It belonged to a travelling family: ownership switched from the old lady to the son, and so on. Trying to establish responsibility for it was a lawyer's nightmare.

Mr. Mates: Only rapid and forthright enforcement can solve problems like that. I am not talking about anything as blatant as my hon. Friend's example. There are people who will defy the law and go on doing it. Others, as a matter of policy, will dig footings without permission so that they can then say that they have started something. Until those footings have been removed and the land has been restored, nothing should be allowed to be started retrospectively.

After several years—because of a change in the control of a council or planning authority, for instance—something that was known to be wrong when it was done becomes right. I do not believe that anyone should be able to negotiate with the planning authorities on that basis when they have themselves been in breach of the law.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): My hon. Friend's suggestion would obviate a problem that I have encountered. That problem has arisen when a breach of planning permission has been taken to court by the district council, and the court has refused to make a decision while planning permissions have not yet been decided.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not want to go through all the possible examples; I am sure that every hon. Member will know of one that has affected him or her professionally. I am making a general point about the frustration experienced by local authorities when people have defied them, and then embarked on a process with which they must co-operate because of the present state of the law.

If we can change that, we need not go as far as creating a criminal offence. The deterrent will be provided: as long as the offending breach is there, no one—not the courts, not the local authorities—will consider regularising the position. Planners must start again, as does the honest citizen, by doing what is proper and applying to do something before they do it. I acknowledge that I am rather late in putting this suggestion to my hon. Friends. I went to the Department of the Environment some years ago with it, but at the time Ministers were not in the same listening mode as I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is in now. I hope that the Government will consider my suggestion if they think it appropriate and do something about it in the other place.

Mr. Yeo: This has been a formidable debate. Much more interest than I had imagined has been evinced in this humble new clause which we have tabled to deal with the problem in a way which we believe will be effective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant), who acknowledged his interest in the matter at the start of his speech, will be aware—although the House may not be—that his predecessor in his role as parliamentary adviser to the National Federation of Demolition Contractors was none other than my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. In view of the advancement of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) from the post of adviser to the federation to his present post in Government, I look forward to welcoming my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West to the Front Bench again shortly.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West confirm that the National Federation of Demolition Contractors is not against the aims of the new clause. I emphasise to him and to other of my hon. Friends who spoke in the debate that, where planning permission has been granted for a replacement building on a site, even if it is the site of a dwelling house, it is not necessary to seek specific permission to demolish the dwelling house. The fact of granting permission for a new building on the site

which can be constructed only after the existing dwelling house has been demolished will remove the need to go through any further process.

Some of the anxieties which have been expressed about delays may prove to be misplaced. The majority of responsible developers and, after the new clause has been passed, even irresponsible developers will find it much quicker and more convenient to seek permission for the building or development with which they wish to replace an existing dwelling house before attempting to demolish it. Therefore, they will choose to seek planning permission. Once they have obtained permission, they will be free to press on with the demolition without further delay.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West spoke about dangerous buildings. It is an important point which I hope that we shall address when we consult about how the provisions that we are introducing will be implemented. There is a real issue at stake. I undertake to consider it carefully during the consultation.

Sir Anthony Durant: Bearing in mind my interest, will the Government issue a consultative document to the National Federation of Demolition Contractors so that it can express its views?

Mr. Yeo: Of course I shall ensure that the federation receives our consultation document.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) raised a constituency problem. He managed with some ingenuity to make a speech which it seemed had been prepared for the new clause which was not called. His speech gave the House a chance to recognise what a vigorous champion of his constituents' interests he is. I cannot comment on the specific cases that he raised. However, as he knows, I have written to him today to emphasise the powers that all local authorities have on compulsory purchase. Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives local authorities powers of compulsory acquisition where that acquisition would be in the interests of the better planning of the area. Such compulsory purchases must be confirmed by the Secretary of State.

I recognise the problem which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East identified. The powers that the local authority has can be used where the redevelopment would be carried out not by the local authority or any other statutory body but by a private developer. I hope that he will draw those powers to the attention of his local authority and ensure that if it is possible for it to use them in the cases to which he referred, it will do so, as it is so clearly in the interests of his constituents.

My hon. Friends the Members for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and for Torbay (Mr. Allason) raised several points which seemed in some respects similar to the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East. As I said, we shall consult local authorities. I am sure that they will advise us if they feel that their powers of enforcement are inadequate. However, existing enforcement powers are being put to good use already. There are plenty of examples of local authorities taking successful enforcement action to require the demolition of an unauthorised building.

In today's press, hon. Members may have seen that a building described by the developers as a cow shed which was constructed at a cost of £350,000 and contained windows and fireplaces—perhaps for fires to keep the lambs warm in their early months of life—was required to be demolished. It was an unlawful development and it has now been blown up. The developer has lost his £350,000 house as a result of the vigorous enforcement action taken by the relevant planning authority. There have been several other such examples. I shall not go through the whole list now, but the House should be assured that many local authorities are making effective use of existing powers, even before they have the benefit of the new clause.

6.15 pm

As hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee—of whom my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay was not one—will know, the Bill contains a fair number of additional enforcement powers which greatly strengthen the position of local authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) suggested that the Government had hoped to put the Bill through its Standing Committee in a day. I assure the House, and hon. Members who served on the Committee will recognise, that there is no possibility of any Standing Committee on which my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams serves completing its proceedings in a day. A year would probably be nearer the mark. However, in the end my hon. Friend showed great restraint, as he did again in his speech today.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams for his congratulations to us on responding to the anxieties that people have expressed about demolition. I share his anxiety about the delay, but, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West, in practice, I do not believe that it will prove to be a major difficulty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) made an interesting suggestion of a 12-week limit within which local authorities should consider applications. Thereafter, applications would be deemed to have been approved. I shall reflect on that point. In practice, the vast majority of delays will arise on applications for redevelopment rather than specifically for demolition, so I hope that long delays in considering applications for demolition will not be a frequent problem. I shall certainly reflect on my hon. Friend's suggestion.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams asked about the consultation process. I cannot give him a precise date. We certainly wish to implement the proposals as soon as possible, so I hope that the consultation process will be completed during the summer. My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) expressed his opposition to criminalisation. I was interested in his suggestion that local authorities should refuse to consider applications where some unlawful development has commenced. My initial thought is that it would be a sweeping measure. In some cases, a minor and technical breach of planning control occurs inadvertently when some new development takes place before planning permission has been granted. It might be rather sweeping to say that no application for any development can be even considered while the technical breach exists. However, I shall certainly reflect on my hon. Friend's suggestions.

Mr. Mates: I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not suggest that, if a developer or individual makes a mistake and goes wrong after being given permission, the matter cannot be put right. I suggest that, if a developer sets off

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to do something without permission, he cannot do so inadvertently. If one digs footings for a house, one knows that one must have permission to do so. If one sets up a caravan park, one knows that one requires permission to do so. When a development is undertaken without permission ab initio and deliberately, we should say that the breach must stop before any planning application can be entertained. That is a similar principle to the Latin saying which I cannot recall—I cannot immediately see a lawyer in the Chamber. It is to the effect that, when one comes before justice, one must come with clean hands. Someone else could put that more eloquently than me, but that is what I mean.

Mr. Yeo: I appreciate the distinction that my hon. Friend draws. I shall reflect on his interesting suggestion and write to him.

Mr. Soley: In Committee, this matter was thrashed out to some extent in the context of the matter of enforcement. I want to put to the Minister again a point that I put to him on that occasion. It is related to the point that has just been made by his hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates). If a local authority had a general duty of enforcement, including the possibility of retrospective planning permission, it would be able to get round the problem. If a breach, whether intentional or unintentional, were very minor, the local authority might not want to create a big hassle. In such a case, the authority could give permission retrospectively, but would still have a general duty to enforce. Extreme cases such as have been mentioned by the hon. Member for East Hampshire would be caught, but the local authority could deal with minor indiscretions.

Mr. Yeo: I am not sure how that would fit in with the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates). It seems to me that the granting of retrospective planning permission would be made impossible if my hon. Friend's suggestion were accepted. I understand the force of the argument that any unauthorised development must be reversed before an application is considered. Such a procedure would indeed be a major deterrent. People would have to be extremely careful, even if they were thinking of erecting only a garage. What the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) is suggesting is rather different. I do not think that the two suggestions go together.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith explained that he was not in favour of criminalisation. Perhaps, as he is a former probation officer, that is not surprising. He may not want to have to look after a lot of developers should he lose his seat in this House. But I do not believe that the problem of uncertainty is quite as great as he suggests. Indeed, I see some advantages in the use of secondary legislation. It would give the Government—indeed, any Government—some flexibility. If, after a number of years' experience, a review of practices were needed, it might be rather easier to change the law through secondary legislation than through a new Bill. Part of the problem relating to demolition arises from the case to which I referred when I opened this debate.

I hope that I have dealt with all the points that have been raised. If not, I shall gladly write to any hon. Member who feels aggrieved. I believe that the Government's case is clear, and I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

HOME LOSS PAYMENTS: NORTHERN IRELAND

'An Order in Council under paragraph 1(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974 (exercise of legislative functions for Northern Ireland) which states that it is made only for purposes corresponding to the purposes of sections 61 and 62 of this Act—

(a) shall not be subject to paragraph 1(4) and (5) of that Schedule (affirmative resolution procedure and procedure in cases of urgency), but

(b) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 62.

Mr. Yeo: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of these measures is to permit the extension to Northern Ireland, by the negative resolution Order in Council procedure, of the home loss payment provisions contained in clauses 61 and 62. The measures are essentially technical, but I shall be happy to explain them further if anyone wishes me to do so.

Mr. Soley: This issue was debated in Committee, but I should like to put it on record that what applies to the rest of the United Kingdom applies to Northern Ireland also. Tenants deserve a better deal. We welcome the increased home loss payments for owner-occupiers, but it is unreasonable to assume that a tenant's investment in a home is necessarily much less as is reflected in the provision. As was said many times in Committee, many tenants invest a great deal of time and money in their homes. If my memory serves me correctly, the compensation that such a person receives for his home is £2,500. That is a paltry sum for someone who has occupied a house for, say, 30 years and has spent much of his savings on putting it into high-class condition. It is sad that the Minister cannot be more generous.

Mr. Yeo: We have had a fairly extensive debate on that problem. These measures will honour an assurance, given in another place many years ago, that the people of Northern Ireland would be treated no less favourably, in financial terms in relation to planning matters, than their counterparts in Great Britain.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

DEMOLITION OF BUILDINGS

'.—(1) In section 19 of the 1972 Act (meaning of "development") after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) For the purposes of this Act "building operations" includes—

(a) demolition of buildings;

(b) rebuilding;

(c) structural alterations of or additions to buildings; and

(d) other operations normally undertaken by a person carrying on business as a builder."

(2) In subsection (2) of that section after paragraph (f) there is inserted—

"(g) the demolition of any description of building specified in a direction given by the Secretary of State to planning authorities generally or to a particular planning authority."

(3) After section 154(3) of the 1972 Act (compensation for refusal or conditional grant of planning permission formerly granted by development order) there is inserted—

"(3A) Regulations made by virtue of this subsection may provide that subsections (1) and (2) of this section shall not apply where planning permission granted by a development order for demolition of buildings or any description of buildings is withdrawn by the issue of directions under powers conferred by the order.".'.—*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 7

INTERDICTS RESTRAINING BREACHES OF PLANNING CONTROL

'After section 260 of the 1972 Act there is inserted—

"Interdicts restraining breaches of planning control

260A.—(1) Whether or not they have exercised or propose to exercise any of their other powers under this Act, a planning authority may seek to restrain or prevent any actual or apprehended breach of any of the controls provided for by or under this Act by means of an application for interdict.

(2) On an application under subsection (1) of this section the court may grant such interdict as it thinks appropriate for the purpose of restraining or preventing the breach.

(3) In this section "the court" means the Court of Session or the sheriff.".'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is supported by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It introduces a power to allow planning authorities to seek interdict in cases where a breach of planning control has taken place or is expected to take place. This express power to take action in this way, irrespective of the stage reached in the planning enforcement process, will greatly assist authorities to ensure that cases of the most flagrant abuse can be dealt with speedily. I know that this new power will be welcomed by planning authorities to help them to protect the environment in our towns and countryside.

Once a developer decides to flout the planning system by putting up some monstrous development without seeking planning permission, it takes some time to go through the full enforcement procedures. Now, an authority will be able to take immediate action to prevent the development from taking place. Let me take another example—that of a developer who intends to cut down an expanse of woodland of outstanding amenity. Interdict will prevent that. Anyone breaching an interdict is in contempt of court, and risks a heavy penalty. I believe that the new clause will be widely welcomed.

Dr. Godman: I welcome the new clause. Earlier today, I spoke to Mr. Ian Wilson, the chief executive of Inverclyde district council. Mr. Wilson—an official whom the Minister has met more than once—said that the new clause is precisely the kind of medicine that planning authorities need. He referred to a case that has recently caused a great deal of controversy in Greenock. Developers simply ignored the local authority and commenced the construction of a private nursing home. I think that the Minister is familiar with the case. Inverclyde district council tried to have the construction halted. Under the existing scheme, the builders were issued with an order. But, as the Minister knows, many months can pass before decisive action is taken. If that issue had not been settled in a most amicable fashion this week, the council would eventually have had to take the case to the procurator fiscal. That would be an unwieldy and cumbersome means of dealing with builders and others who are less than scrupulous.

I was pleased to hear the Minister refer to the destruction of woodland. What is proposed will please many rural authorities throughout mainland Scotland, as well as people in the islands.

Presumably, as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has welcomed the provision, consultations took place with legal parties. Subsection (3) of the new clause says:

"'the court' means the Court of Session or the sheriff."

Presumably "the sheriff" means the sheriff court. Is the Minister in a position to estimate how long it would take to obtain such an interdict, given that, with modern methods, a stretch of woodland could be cleared within several days, or an even shorter time?

How long would it take to obtain the court's support? Also, has the Minister or his officials estimated the increase in the work load of the sheriff court or the Court of Session? The incident in Greenock to which I referred by way of illustration is not an extremely rare phenomenon, as any member of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities would say. It is necessary to obtain the court's support in a shorter time. There is also the question of the extra work placed upon the sheriff court. Presumably—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—most of the actions will be taken in that court and not in the Court of Session.

I welcome the proposal. It will be greeted with pleasure by many people throughout Scotland.

6.30 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I thank the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) for his remarks. Certainly this will provide another effective tool to enable local authorities to take very quick action indeed.

The hon. Member is anxious about how quickly courts will consider such cases. It will be very rapidly indeed in the case of interdicts—literally within hours. Obviously there is a problem with the work loads before the courts, but that is because cases are taking much longer, and it does not relate to interdicts. Committees are sitting to ensure that the courts process cases as quickly as possible, and improvements have been made in recent months. With those assurances, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

OLD MINING PERMISSIONS

'. After section 49G of the 1972 Act there is inserted

"*Old mining permissions.*

49H.—(1) In this section and Schedule 10A to this Act, 'old mining permission' means any planning permission for development—

(a) consisting of the winning and working of minerals, or

(b) involving the depositing of mineral waste,

which is deemed to have been granted by virtue of paragraph 77 of Schedule 22 to this Act (development authorised under interim development orders after 10th November 1943).

(2) An old mining permission shall, if an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is finally determined, have effect as from the final determination as if granted on the terms required to be registered.

(3) If no such development has, at any time in the period of two years ending with 16th May 1991, been carried out to any substantial extent anywhere in, on or under the land to which an old mining permission relates, that permission shall not authorise any such development to be carried out after the coming into force of this section unless—

(a) the permission has effect in accordance with subsection (2) above; and

(b) the development is carried out after such an application is finally determined.

(4) An old mining permission shall—

(a) if no application for the registration of the permission is made under that Schedule, cease to have effect on the day following the last date on which such an application may be made, and

(b) if such an application is refused, cease to have effect on the day following the date on which the application is finally determined.

(5) An old mining permission shall, if—

(a) such an application is granted; but

(b) an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is required to be served before the end of any period and is not so served,

cease to have effect on the day following the last date on which the application to determine those conditions may be served.

(6) Subject to subsection (3) above, this section—

(a) shall not affect any development carried out under an old mining permission before an application under that Schedule to determine the conditions to which the permission is to be subject is finally determined or, as the case may be, the date on which the permission ceases to have effect; and

(b) shall not affect any order made or having effect as if made under section 49 or 49A to 49F of this Act (discontinuance, etc., orders).".'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 15

TRANSITIONAL PROVISION AS TO COMPENSATION REGULATIONS

'. Without prejudice to section 17(2) of the Interpretation Act 1978, any regulations made, or having effect as if made, by virtue of section 167A (regulations as to mineral compensation) of the 1972 Act shall, to the extent that they are in force on the coming into force of paragraph 10A of Schedule 7 to this Act, have effect as if made under section 167A of that Act as substituted by that paragraph.'—*[Sir George Young.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

ADDITIONAL SUM OF COMPENSATION FOR SMALL FIRMS

'After section 5 of the Land Compensation Act 1961 there is inserted—

"5A.(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, in addition to compensation in respect of the value of any interest in land assessed in accordance with section 5 of this Act, there shall be paid by the acquiring authority an additional sum.

(2) Payment of an additional sum under this section shall be made only where:

(a) the land or premises acquired are used for the purposes of a small firm, and

(b) the claimant is the owner of the land, or is a tenant entitled to compensation under section 20 of the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965.

(3) Subject to subsection (4) the amount of the additional sum shall be calculated as 10 per cent. of the compensation referred to in subsection (1).

(4) Where relevant the amount of the additional sum shall be adjusted as follows:

(a) If the claimant is entitled to an additional sum under this section and a home loss payment under section 29 of the Land Compensation Act 1973, only the higher of the two amounts shall be payable and not both.

(b) No payment of an additional sum under this section shall exceed £25,000.

(5) The Secretary of State may from time to time by order substitute another sum for the sum specified in subsection (4)(b) above; and the power to make orders under this section shall be exercisable by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(6) In this section:

'Small firm' means any person who, at the date of the notice to treat, is carrying on a business and the number of employees employed by him, added to the number of employees employed by any associated employer of his, does not exceed 20.".'.—*[Mr. Moate.]*

Brought up, and read the first time.

Mr. Moate: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause seeks to extend to small firms the treatment granted to home owners in the Bill. In my understanding at least, the term "small firms" includes small farms. Therefore, I believe that this proposal will certainly be warmly welcomed in the county of Kent because of the prospect of railway development there at some time in the future. Having said that, this is not a parochial matter—the clause will be welcomed by small businesses and farmers throughout the land, because it extends them justice which has so far been denied to them. I am also delighted that justice is now being offered to house owners in this Bill.

New clause 5 is a sensible proposal. It is limited in cost and is impeccably drafted—in case any of my hon. Friends seek to suggest that it is faulty on those grounds. Also, I believe that it is well-precedented. I hope that it will be acceptable in some form or other to my hon. Friends.

I should say how much I welcome the home loss payment which is incorporated in the Bill. That is an important measure and it has not yet received the welcome or the praise that it deserves from the country. There can be few hon. Members who have not had to face constituents whose homes are to be compulsorily purchased, especially as a result of road developments. We

have had to defend the argument that they would get a district valuer's valuation of their home, plus the modest home loss payment that has been provided for.

Few of us would find it difficult to argue the case for compulsory purchase on the basis of public need. Equally, for a long time, most of us have conceded the principle that one would like more generous treatment of home owners and others who are compulsorily dispossessed of their property. Therefore, I warmly welcome the proposal that home owners whose property is compulsorily purchased will get 10 per cent. of the value—up to a maximum of £15,000—the fact that there is greater flexibility with blight notice acquisitions, and that the residential qualifications are reduced from five years to one year. Those proposals are warmly welcomed and it is right that Parliament should be doing that. The only people who will be unhappy are those whose property has been purchased compulsorily in recent years and who will not have received such a payment.

I congratulate my hon. Friends on that proposal and I hope that it will be seen as a step in the right direction towards restoring equity and speeding up development. If we are generous in the way that we deal with compulsory purchase, it must reflect upon individuals who are faced with such purchases. That will make them less resistant and more willing to deal—less inclined to object when development is proposed. It has often been observed how much better the French are at getting on with developments. Why should that be? It is often because the French are more generous in their dealings with individuals, companies and others who are compulsorily bought out. We have not been generous in the past and the Bill goes a great way to remedy that. It is a step in the right direction, but let us take it a little further. Unwilling sellers of small firms or small farms should be treated in the same way as we are proposing to deal with home owners in the Bill. New clause 5 sets that out.

As I have made clear, the clause is modest in its intent and limited in cost. We are not seeking to widen the clause to cover large businesses—it is specifically for small businesses. We are not seeking an open-ended commitment—it is limited to about £25,000 maximum payment. The clause has been well drafted—not by me, I hasten to add—because it follows clear precedents in other legislation defining small firms. I refer especially to the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill, where we clearly defined small firms and in clause 30 provide for compensation for consequential losses for small firms. If we could do it there, why should we not do it in this instance? I suppose that it will be argued that the Government are providing compensation for home owners because there are unknown costs if a person has to move home. If we apply that rule to home owners, why should we not apply it to small businesses?

The old compensation legislation provided that no extra compensation should be given merely because the compulsory purchase involved an unwilling seller. But that same principle applied to homes, so why should it not apply to the farmer? In many cases, if a small farmer or a small company is going to lose land or a part of its land, it too is faced with the fact that tremendous uncertainty and unknown costs that might arise in the future. It is true that they might well already receive some compensation for severance or for other injurious effects of the development or compulsory purchase, but they do not know quite what the future holds in terms of relocation, or how long it will take to get alternative land, or even if that is possible.

The disruption that small firms and farms face in those circumstances is very serious indeed. Is it unreasonable that Parliament should say that an additional 10 per cent. of the land value should be paid to such companies or farmers because society has demanded their land for development? That seems an eminently reasonable proposition, and I should think that it will automatically gain acceptance.

Mr. Wolfson: Does my hon. Friend agree that a compulsory purchase order is often a feared instrument which has an appallingly disruptive effect on people's lives and on small businesses? However, being more generous, as new clause 5 proposes, will assist in achieving the development for which the compulsory purchase order has been made and will avoid some of the fears, difficulties and constraints of time that result from orders being opposed.

Mr. Moate: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The new high-speed rail link through Kent is generating tremendous fear and alarm in many parts of the county, but how many landowners or small businesses on the proposed line of development would more readily accept the proposition if they knew that they would be offered fair compensation? By "fair", I mean a small payment as compensation for their property being compulsorily purchased. How much more willing they would be to respond constructively if the system were fair.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful for the way in which my hon. Friend is introducing this subject, which is important to many people in this country. Does he agree that the problem is that the planning process has not been generous? People have dug their heels in, as a result of which planning new development has taken much longer than necessary. New clause 5 would speed things up, because it offers a more practical, positive and constructive approach. People would co-operate rather than dig their heels in.

Mr. Moate: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. The Government introduced the home loss payment because homes are often disrupted or acquired to allow road construction. Most hon. Members are aware of cases where we would have wished a home owner to be compensated more generously. My hon. Friend rightly said that we have not been generous with the dispossessed, but surely society should be generous in those circumstances. Being generous will help the process.

Mr. Steen: It will speed it up.

Mr. Moate: It will speed it up. Being cynical, one suspects that sometimes the Treasury has found delay to be an ally as it has had to spend less money. Speed has not always been its main concern, but the home loss payment is evidence that that has now changed.

The proposal to extend that to farmers and small businesses—limited in its effect along the lines precedented in the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill—is sound and will help tremendously in further development.

Even if we do not manage to persuade Ministers of the importance of the new clause, the problem will return time and again. It will certainly return when Kent is faced with major development.

Mr. Steen: I am told that the French build railways and motorways so quickly because they have a generous approach to compensation. Farmers, small businesses and home owners are happy to relinquish ownership because they are paid the market rate and more. Such development is appallingly slow in Britain. Under new clause 5, public money would be spent wisely and the process would be speeded up. Economically, it would be a much better way of proceeding.

Mr. Moate: I believe that the French principle is to pay 125 per cent. of value. I do not know whether that produces a queue of applicants enthusiastically wanting to sell their homes, but it makes for a happier and fairer society. I hope that we will move steadily in that direction.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I intended to speak in support of new clause 5, but as my hon. Friend is putting his case so effectively, that will not be necessary. If my hon. Friends the Members for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) were here, they would support his points in respect of the north Devon link road, which has brought considerable benefits, although delayed, to north Devon. Will my hon. Friend consider a point that has been made to me and other colleagues by the National Farmers Union about a farmer who loses some land for development not only to a public authority but to a privatised company which enjoys compulsory acquisition powers, such as a privatised water authority? Will my hon. Friend draw out that example as evidence for his case?

6.45 pm

Mr. Moate: The cost to public funds need not necessarily be high, because privatised companies will often be the beneficiaries of compulsory purchase. If society is giving compulsory purchase powers to companies that will ultimately obtain profit from the land that is acquired, it is reasonable that we should insist that the vendor be treated generously and fairly. The cost to public funds might be low because it would be passed on to other organisations that will be carrying out the development.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It does not work out like that. I have an interest in road safety. Land was compulsorily purchased in my constituency for road safety improvements. But if the public expenditure of the local authority is being hit by the Government, it is in immediate difficulty in making money available for compensation. That makes it difficult to progress with road safety. The local authority must make available the money to buy land, but it is then clobbered for overspending. I look to the hon. Gentleman to support Labour local authorities which are doing just that.

Mr. Moate: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not advance the proposition that we should not proceed on the grounds of equity because it might marginally increase development costs. If he follows that logic, he will vote against the Bill and the increased home loss payment. The home loss payment will be an expensive proposition, but we all warmly welcome it. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman is saying that, at little additional cost to the Government, we should extend the principle to small businesses that have fewer than 20 employees.

We shall have to face up to that proposition when we start building new rail links to the Channel. It is right that the proposed developer should have to bear the costs and pay a little extra compensation to the farmers, small business men and home owners of Kent, who will have to make some sacrifice in the national interest.

I hope that Ministers will accept the principle of new clause 5 and take us further on the road of justice, along which they have started to take us with the increased home loss payment.

Mr. Speed: I support new clause 5, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) gave an excellent exposition. My constituency is not only threatened—as some would put it—by a new high-speed rail link but faced with the building of the missing link in the M20, which will place a number of small businesses and farmers in severe difficulty. The whole point of the home loss payment, which I believe should be extended to small businesses, is that it involves not only the market value of the property but a recognition by society that compulsory purchase entails dissatisfaction, hardship and very real problems and that compensation should therefore be paid over and above the market value of the property taken.

I do not join my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham in welcoming wholeheartedly the setting of the home loss payment at 10 per cent. or a maximum of £15,000. On the Government's own figures in relation to the new council tax, 10 per cent. of residential properties in my constituency are worth £160,000 or more. Most of them are not mansions but comparatively modest, albeit most agreeable, dwellings in the countryside. In practice, the owners of such properties would receive not a 10 per cent. home loss payment but a payment of 7 or 8 per cent. The principle ought always to be the same. It should be recognised that whatever house one lives in, the state, or the new privatised companies, ought to be more generous than has been the case in the past. That is necessary to compensate the owner for the disturbance and problems that he suffers.

Let us be honest about it: at the moment, small businesses—and I accept the definition—farmers and others have problems with the new business rate. In my area, members of that group are not happy. Moreover, for various historical reasons they may be paying more in the south and the midlands than in the north. They may then be clobbered by new rail or road developments, developments by the pics or whatever. I certainly accept the point that some companies—privatised or otherwise—have used compulsory powers and found that the land or buildings that they have purchased are redundant in terms of their immediate requirement, and that those companies have made a considerable profit on that land or those buildings. The modest proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham goes some way towards dealing with that question.

I would accept the home loss payment for which the Bill provides—10 per cent., and a maximum of £15,000—even though it is less than generous to London, the south-east and other parts of the country where comparable house prices are higher than in the north, Wales or Scotland. Half a loaf is better than no bread, but let us make it three quarters of a loaf by extending this important principle to small businesses, as suggested in the new clause.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): In view of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), it seems almost churlish to rise in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) I do not, of course, disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton about the excellence of our hon. Friend's proposal. However, I come to these matters as something of a veteran. I represented the former constituency of Middleton and Prestwich. Having enjoyed the driving through that constituency of the M62, and having dealt with the spate of claims and difficulties to which it gave rise, I then had the good fortune to be chosen as the hon. Member for Saffron Walden and immediately found myself dealing with the aftermath of the construction of the M11. I found that, although the construction had been completed, the settlement of claims arising from it had by no means been dealt with; it dragged on for a number of years thereafter.

We then had the good fortune to have the decision by the Government to develop Stansted airport, which gave rise to a few more examples of the kind of difficulties that can occur when people are dispossessed. I feel passionately that there is an unjustice here that needs to be given further attention. It is entirely right that the principle that the Government, to their credit, are applying in respect of home loss payments should be extended as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham suggests.

I can recall one example in particular. The owner of a caravan site in my constituency was dispossessed to make way for the expansion of the airport. The British Airports Authority subsequently developed a new caravan site and, after a few years, decided to sell it because the BAA was not in the business of running caravan sites. Had there been adequate compensation in the first place, however, the business man who ran that caravan site in my constituency could simply have carried on his business. That would have been the fair and equitable outcome. At the moment, it seems that our arrangements are not adequate to allow business men a fair crack of the whip.

The question that we should ask ourselves—the question that Ministers should address—is whether a need arises for the sort of payment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham. On the basis of my experience in different places, I believe that the answer is most emphatically yes.

I support the argument advanced by several of my hon. Friends about the help that the new clause would give not only to individuals but to the whole process of speeding development. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has said in reply to me that it is usually other people who stand in the way of development and that they would not be affected by the proposals. I invite my hon. Friend to consider that, in the case of roads, in particular, it is very much the landowner and the business man who are directly affected. I believe that the proposals would—help in the development of roads and railways—in cases in which, at present, landowners, seeing their business threatened and knowing that they will not be compensated adequately to allow them to continue with their business, dig in their heels and fight the developments rather harder than they might otherwise.

In the end, this is a matter of fairness, and a matter of balance between the need for development and the needs of those who are dispossessed. I do not think that we have matters right at the moment, and I think that the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham would go a substantial way to putting them right.

Mr. Steen: I could not have put it better than my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), whose experience of compulsory purchase orders and the suffering that they cause to people living in the area must be second to none. A number of us feel that the Government have made an enormous stride forward. We should welcome and be grateful for that and recognise that the Government have done a first-rate job in introducing a compensation concept plus something more. That is great news, and the public will welcome it.

The problem is that the Government always say, "We cannot do more," because the Treasury let them go to 10 per cent. or £15,000 and then said, "No more." It is like the chap trying to sell a car who says, " I cannot sell it at that price, I am afraid, because it belongs to my brother-in-law." The Government say, "We cannot extend the concession because the Treasury says that it is not possible."

My concern is not so much about the figures—although I am concerned about the group of people who would benefit—but about the fact that Britain is lagging behind and because our planning system is part of the problem. It is antiquated, slow, bureaucratic and ungenerous. The result is that, instead of developments going through quickly and our getting things done, everything takes too long. By the time an application is granted, the developer may have moved. The building of a road may be slowed up for so long that, by the time it is built, it is the wrong road, or in the wrong place, or too small.

Mr. Vaz: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Local people in my area, too, are concerned because they simply do not know what the result of an inquiry may be, and they do not know because of the tremendous delay. If the element of delay were removed from the system, people would at least be in a position to know whether they would receive compensation and to know the outcome of the appeal. It is the delay that causes anxiety and hardship to so many local people.

7 pm

Mr. Steen: The hon. Member, who served with me on the Standing Committee and is experienced in matters of this kind, makes a valid point. It is uncertainty that leads to distrust, anxiety and, ultimately, a feeling of hostility towards the public authorities. In this country there is far too much hostility to central and local government, which is aggravated by our planning laws and the way we approach compensation when the public authority wants to do something. It is very much the big public body with a club saying to the members of a local community that it will take their land, their farms or their small businesses and pay them the market rate and nothing more. That is no incentive for anyone to co-operate with the public authorities.

The Government have made a very constructive and useful move in saying that they will pay compensation plus. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) has said, it is a fine idea, it is most welcome, but it is not quite enough, so can we please extend it a bit so that

[Mr. Steen]

people whose farms or businesses are affected get something as well? That is an innocuous, sensible and practical suggestion.

I hope that the Ministers who are dealing with this matter will not use the Treasury argument and that they will not blame the Treasury for the lack of progress in this country. Here is an opportunity to get this country moving again. It is extremely sluggish, and one of the reasons is the planning regime. When a public authority wants to do things, it is too difficult and too slow. With rather more generous compensation, with a slight extension, we can get the country moving again, and I cannot believe that Ministers do not want that to happen.

Mr. Yeo: I am glad to have the chance to reply to this debate, which has been useful. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) for his support—which was stated in rather more unqualified terms than those used by my other hon. Friends who contributed to the debate—for our improvement to the home loss payment.

My hon. Friend's new clause, as he explained, would provide for an additional amount of compensation to be paid where a small business is acquired compulsorily. This would be a business loss payment broadly comparable to the revised home loss payment scheme for residential acquisitions, but would be subject to the considerably higher ceiling of £25,000. Its basis is slightly different from that for home loss payments in that the payment would be calculated on the total compensation payable for the business rather than the value of the property only. The new clause goes on—perhaps somewhat bravely—to define a small business as one run by someone who, in conjunction with his associates, employs up to 20 people.

I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend's evident concern about small businesses affected by compulsory purchase. Clearly, he struck a chord with quite a number of my hon. Friends. The encouragement and protection of small businesses are causes which remain very close to the Government's heart, as the House will, I am sure, recognise from the report entitled "Small Firms in Britain 1991" recently published by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

It goes without saying that compulsory purchase of any property will almost invariably come as an unwelcome shock to those affected. However, on principle, I do not think that I can accept the sort of proposal advocated by my hon. Friend. As we have pointed out many times at earlier stages of the debates on the Bill, home loss payments are made in recognition of the intense personal distress and upheaval which are bound to affect almost anyone who is compulsorily displaced from his home.

Although I would not dispute the possibility that the compulsory purchase of a property occupied by a small business could well give rise to a measure of distress for the owner—or, indeed, for his employees—I find it hard to accept that such distress could match that felt by someone who was forced to leave his home. Indeed, from time to time, small businesses may even gain by moving as a result of a compulsory purchase from a rundown area being redeveloped to, perhaps, a new commercial unit provided on advantageous terms by the local authority.

From the debate, to which I listened carefully, it seemed that a number of my hon. Friends may not be clear about the extent of existing compensation to small businesses. That compensation is by no means to the value of any property involved.

I should point out that, when a business is compulsorily acquired, the owner is already entitled to receive, in addition to the market value of his interest in the land on which it is situated, full compensation for the disturbance of his business. This will cover all reasonable expenses that are likely to be incurred by the owner in relocating his business to similar replacement premises, including legal costs and compensation for the diminution or loss of goodwill.

It takes into account how the business was run and how it would have fared if there had been no compulsory purchase. It also takes into account the temporary or permanent loss of profits, although, of course, that does not include profits which could arise from a future expansion of the business, but that may, in any case, be within the grasp of the owner. As the new clause acknowledges, someone displaced from the home from which he is running a business would normally be entitled to a home loss payment as well as a disturbing payment. We believe that to be a fair and satisfactory system of compensation.

As I said, my hon. Friend had a stab at defining a small business for the purpose of his provision. I am not sure that his definition is one that would suit everybody. The level of 20 employees seems to me to be an arbitrary one and would be seen as unfair by those businesses with marginally more people working in them.

My hon. Friend referred in particular to the position of farmers, and I know that that is a matter of great concern to him. Generally speaking, an owner-occupier or tenant farmer will receive, besides the market value of his interest in the land acquired, including the value of any potential it may have for future development, a home loss payment, where he has to leave his farmhouse, and also a farm loss payment.

The farm loss payment is based on the average annual profit from the land taken. It is designed to help the farmer take up farming on replacement land, which is probably unfamiliar, and to cover the temporary loss of crop yields during the transition. Paragraph 6 of schedule 13 makes significant improvements to the farm loss payment scheme. I dare say that, as it appears on page 171 of the Bill, my hon. Friend may not have reached it in his study of the document. Nevertheless, those improvements are provided and they extend farm loss payments to tenants for a year, or from year to year, and to cases where only part of a holding is taken.

My other hon. Friends who contributed to the debate were, I think, only reinforcing the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham. I have noted the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) for an even higher ceiling on home loss payments. The Bill does, of course, raise the old ceiling very substantially indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) is, as he says, something of an expert on these matters, and I would not deny that from time to time landowners feature among the objectors to proposals for new roads and other such things. But I believe that the evidence of the powers that are held justifies my contention that often the greatest delay is caused by people who do not have a direct financial interest in the matter but have other reasons for advancing their objections.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) will be glad that I have not mentioned the Treasury so far, and I do not intend to do so. However, I should like to deal with the French system, which seems to be so much admired by many of my hon. Friends. Let us take a small farm, one of a size that is not untypical in France but perhaps not quite so typical in some of the constituencies represented by my hon. Friends—a 30-acre farm, the land value of which is, say, about £48,000. The French system provides for a general percentage supplement on top of market value on all claims. In some cases, that supplement can be as high as 25 per cent., but it is confined to the first 100,000 francs—in other words, approximately £10,000. Otherwise the percentage varies from case to case, but the normal percentage is about 10 per cent.

The French system does not reimburse many of the incidental costs which are specificially covered by our provisions—for example, legal and surveying fees. There is no provision for separate home loss or farm loss payments. It is not clear to me that claimants do as well under the French system as my hon. Friends have suggested. However, on the evidence of what they say, it is clear that if we had a system which was much more generous than the French system they would not wish to press their new clause.

Let us return to the example of the 30-acre farm worth £48,000. On the most generous assumption, even if the 25 per cent. figure in the French system were applied to the total value of that farm—I do not think that it would be—there would be an additional £12,000 on top of the £48,000, giving a value of £60,000.

When a 30-acre farm was acquired as a result of the construction of the M25 in 1981, the value of the land taken, including the woodland, was £48,000, but under our system of farm loss payments, an additional £95,000 was paid for injurious affection, severance and loss of sporting rights. A further £18,000 was paid for disturbance, including new signposts, loss of timber, temporary loss of profits, damage to farm buildings, the cost of manure and land drains, reorganisation costs and surveyors' fees. In addition, £15,000 was paid for the value of accommodation works provided by the Department of Transport.

In other words, under the system which is so much admired by some of my hon. Friends, the farmer concerned would have received £48,000 plus £12,000—a total of £60,000. Under the system already in operation in this country, the farmer concerned received a total of £176,000—*[Interruption.]* Are the noises that I hear coming from some of my hon. Friends indicative of their concern about control of public expenditure?

I am beginning to be persuaded that I should table an amendment to make our system less, rather than more, generous. The point is clearly established that, were we to adopt the type of system that my hon. Friends have cited in support of their argument, we should be treating our farmers and small business men less generously than is the case at present.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Is the example that the Minister is recounting fairly typical, or is it the best of the last decade?

Mr. Yeo: It is the only one of the last decade for which I have details tonight. It seems clear that we have in place a system that is probably much more generous and more far-reaching in its scope than many hon. Members appreciate. For the reasons that I have given, it does not seem to us that there is a strong case for giving additional compensation for small businesses or small farmers, and I hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Moate: Hon. Members will have been intrigued by the farm to which the Minister referred and will be wondering whether it is typical. I suspect that my hon. Friend might now be deluged with claims from farmers who feel that they have been treated less favourably by the taxpayer in recent years. He may also find a flood of farmers expecting similarly generous treatment should they lose part of their land to road building or to the proposed high-speed rail link through Kent.

If the Minister is right, perhaps he should welcome the new clause enthusiastically, for he suggested that there would be no cost—indeed, that there would be a profit—to the Treasury. If he does not accept that logic—and he may not—he will perhaps at least accept that the matter should be investigated to see what is the right and fair treatment for farmers. After all, he is suggesting that the French system does not live up to what many of us widely believe it to be. I should be interested to know if what he says is so. Would he be willing to consider carefully figures submitted to him by, say, the NFU, which can no doubt research the matter to discover the correct position?

When referring to the additional sums available to farmers, the Minister suggested that the compensation related in part to profits derived from the farm. That could produce hollow laughter from some farmers right now. They might find it difficult to give evidence of farming profits. It may be that the case that the Minister cited was a one-off instance and that we shall not witness that type of compensation arising again. He should at least respond to an invitation to examine the figures to see whether he is wrong. Is a 110 per cent. payment, with maximum compensation of £25,000, for small farmers more generous? He has really agreed to examine that, because he has conceded the principle.

The Minister congratulated me on my courage in defining small firms. I give credit to the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill, clause 30 of which defines it in the way I have used. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will agree that there is a legitimate precedent for determining what is and what is not a small firm. Relating that to farming, a farm with 20 employees is reasonably large these days, so it seems that that is not a difficult or unreasonable line to draw.

7.15 pm

My hon. Friend justified his argument that there should be an extra payment to home owners on the grounds of the personal distress that is caused. It is legitimate to argue that, in such cases, there should be generous and fair home loss payments. But he did not argue forcefully that there was a major distinction between the personal distress caused to a home owner and the personal distress caused to a small business man or farmer who loses part or all of his land. The distress must be equally as great.

Hon. Members are right to say that, basically, when society compulsorily acquires land, there should be a generous additional payment to recognise that factor. Whether it is mentioned in terms of distress, disruption or severance in connection with business, an additional payment should be made. That is the principle that we have conceded by the home loss payment. That is why

hon. Members have welcomed the principle of extending that payment. We may say that it does not go far enough, but broadly, the extra £15,000 is warmly welcomed. Exactly the same principle should be applied to small businesses and farmers.

I suspect that this is not one of those evenings when my hon. Friends would wish to press this matter to a Division —*[Interruption.]* I hear noises coming from Opposition Members. Did we hear from the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) an interesting speech from the Labour Front Bench, supporting our case? He has not said a word in the debate. There has been no support from him tonight for small businesses and farmers, yet he is now encouraging us to press the matter to a Division. Where are his troops?

Mr. Soley: I have been so impressed by the compelling case that the hon. Gentleman has been making that my hon. Friends and I have been waiting anxiously to get into the Lobby to vote. The example from France that he gave was excellent, and he is right. They got the French side of the line through quickly because of their compensation system, whereas in this country we do not have such a link. When people come across Europe on the high-speed train, they will transfer at Dover into something resembling Thomas the Tank Engine. That says everything about the kind of system that we have. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, if he leads us into the Lobby, we shall be with him.

Mr. Moate: I wish that the hon. Gentleman had not made those comments about the contrast between what the traveller will see when he reaches the British Rail side, because, like many others, he is totally underestimating the amount of investment that has gone into providing a high-speed link which, from 1993, will take travellers from Waterloo terminal through to Paris in three hours— *[Interruption.]* That construction is under way. It is not the high-speed link, but there will be a first-class rail service and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that much has been achieved.

Is the hon. Member for Hammersmith saying that he has more Labour Members ready to vote than the four or five currently in the chamber? If he claims that hordes of Labour supporters will be joining us in the Lobby, he tempts me, and if my hon. Friends feel the same way, I shall be delighted to press the matter to a Division—not because I believe that we can win, but because the message will have got through to the Government that we should be more generous in the compensation we give. By forcing the matter to a vote, we may be starting something, so that sooner rather than later we shall get more generous compensation arrangements in our legislation.

Mr. Soley: I move that the Question be put, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I think that the debate is coming to a natural conclusion, and I will now put the Question.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 47, Noes 107.

Division No. 146] **[7.18 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benyon, W.
Boateng, Paul
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gryils, Michael
Haselhurst, Alan
Haynes, Frank
Kirkwood, Archy
McCrea, Rev William
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maginnis, Ken
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meale, Alan
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rathbone, Tim
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Trimble, David
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Vaz and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Couchman, James
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Hague, William
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knowles, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sheraby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 9

STATUS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NO. 2)

'For section 70(2) of the principal Act there is substituted—

"(1) The provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, shall be the starting point for the authority when dealing with such an application and it shall also have regard to any other material considerations".'.—*[Mr. Soley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Soley: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: new clause 13—*Status of the development plan*—

'—For section 70(2) of the principal Act there is substituted—

"(1) In dealing with such an application the authority shall first consider the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and shall then have regard to any other material considerations.".'

Amendment No. 137, in schedule 3, page 108, line 49, at end insert

'(11) The provisions of a current and properly constituted local development plan with an approved county structure plan shall prevail over any conflicting provisions or advice set out in planning policy guidance notes which may be issued from time to time by the Department of Environment'.

Mr. Soley: The new clauses will give a much higher status to the development plan. On Second Reading, the Minister announced that the Government had made a welcome conversion and that development should be plan-led rather than market-led. We welcome the Government's conversion. We felt that the Bill was weak in terms of ensuring that the plan was given a high enough status. The Bill ensures that structure and local plans are available throughout the country, but it does not ensure that they are given sufficient priority to guarantee that, when decisions are taken about development, the plan and not the developers' desires comes first.

7.30 pm

We have tabled two new clauses. New clause 9 would insert:

"The provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, shall be the starting point for the authority".

We included the words "starting point" because they seemed to help the Government out of their problems of definition. We also tabled new clause 13, which is signed by a number of Conservative Members. It goes into more detail and states:

'—For section 70(2) of the principal Act there is substituted—

"(1) In dealing with such an application the authority shall first consider the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and shall then have regard to any other material considerations.".'

That is a stronger interpretation than that of new clause 9.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), but I missed the last Division. I was in my office, off the main Committee Corridor, and I did not hear a bell. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) did not hear one either. Will the Serjeant at Arms check whether the bells are working properly?

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was in Committee Room 21 on the upper Committee Corridor and heard no bell. It seems that the bells may not be working.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I shall have inquiries made and inform the House of the outcome.

Mr. Soley: I am pleased that the Government have said that, following discussion between spokesmen from the two main parties this afternoon, the Government are to concede to us new clause 13. By any standards, that new clause constitutes one of the most important changes that the Government have made during the Bill's passage, both through this House and the House of Lords. I welcome that concession and look on it favourably.

I can set aside much of the rest of my speech for the moment, although I may seek the leave of the House to catch your attention again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that that will not be necessary and I think it might be easier and save the time of the House if I now make way for the Minister and other hon. Members to address the House so that we may take the matter further.

The commitment that the Government have given today gives a much higher status to the development plan and will go a long way to ensuring that development is plan led. The Bill will still not be the ideal one that the Labour party would have proposed, but it is undoubtedly a significant step forward and one that I welcome.

Mr. Wolfson: If what the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has intimated is correct, I greatly welcome the Government's action. Over the past 12 years, I have had much correspondence with, and made many direct representations to, the Ministers' predecessors at the Department of the Environment on the key importance of local planning decisions—which are taken by local authorities with local knowledge and which are responsive to local interests and concerns being upheld on appeal. When such decisions are overturned, it is often a cause of anger, bewilderment and much concern in the local community.

During the past two years, one of the responses that I have received when making representations to the Department of the Environment has been that, where local plans do not exist or are out of date, it makes it difficult for the inspector and the Minister to uphold the local decisions. My local authority has been pressed by me into bringing its local plans up to date. It has also done so partly of its own volition. Therefore, I have always believed that it is important to give the maximum weight to the local plan in planning decisions, and I welcome both the new clauses. I am delighted if the Minister is to concede them.

Mr. Wiggin: My hon. Friend the Minister and one or two of my hon. Friends will know that I have taken a considerable interest in the planning process in the past few years. My attention was drawn to the subject by a substantial body of public feeling in my constituency and those of many of my hon. Friends. At least 100 of them

[Mr. Wiggin]

have spoken of the almost unregulated way in which speculative housing was being permitted under our planning legislation. It swiftly became apparent that, to be constructive, I would have to become, if not expert, a great deal more knowledgeable on planning laws. Thanks to the able assistance of many people, I feel that my appreciation of the subject has improved. My conclusion has to be that the planning laws are a devious and elaborate device for the Government to impose their decisions on the population in an expensive, laborious and delaying manner, and without the due good effect of consulting local opinion, which is what we want.

When the Bill was first thought about two or three years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the then Secretary of State, intimated that he would abolish county structure plans. I shall not enter into a debate about the future of counties, because that is another matter, but it was more than 10 years before the majority of our counties had evolved proper structure plans. In my county of Avon, the structure plan was once again being amended recently. I do not complain about that, but to say that the county structure plan system had failed before the last of the babies were even born was a premature destruction of the theory—and I was totally opposed to that.

We had a debate on that subject, and my hon. Friend the member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and others made it clear that we did not think that it was a good idea. Therefore, when the Bill was presented without such a proposal, we were all pleased. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning said:

"We want the system to be plan-led . . . We want the district plan to be the indicator—the signal—of what is permitted development and the market must respond to the local plan."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1991; Vol. 187 c. 823.]

In my constituency during the past two years there have been at least two substantial planning proposals—I can think of three, and there are probably many more—which fall well outside the structure plan. However, the proposals appeal to my district council and the planning authority for commercial and other perfectly good reasons, and so were given a "first reading" by the district council. The Minister, in my view rightly, called in both those cases and the plans have either been changed or the developers have withdrawn the applications. The system must work; it is no good having all the bureaucracy if we do not get a sensible result. Amendment No. 137 rightly gives priority to the local plan. On Second Reading and in Committee, there was much talk about the merits of the local plan. I should like an assurance from the Minister that he will ensure that henceforth the local plan matters.

The Minister's first job is to educate local councillors in the planning law—just as I had to learn more about the laws, the councillors will have to learn more about what they mean—and to emphasise again that, in inspectors' decisions confirmed by the Minister, the local development plan is the one that matters. It does not take much imagination to understand the expense and time involved in preparing detailed local plans. It is tiresome for a councillor, because he has to think into the future, make projections and consider what his district will look like. Once that has been done, Ministers must, for goodness' sake, uphold the decisions.

I am sorry to say that there is a fairly lengthy history of inspectors' decisions not upholding local plans. We come to the wretched intervention of central Government through the planning policy guidance notes and circulars which the courts have consistently regarded as overriding the local arguments and local opinion. I had hoped that the Bill would deal with that problem, but it has not. We are left with basically the same structure and with a mass of complicated guidance notes which are lengthy and legalistic—they have to be if they are to be used as the basis of planning decisions. More in sorrow than in anger, I must say that I believe that the Bill has missed an opportunity.

We strongly support our planning laws. I say "we" because I include my hon. Friends. The country should be grateful for the basic framework of our planning laws because they have saved us from many disasters. One has only to consider parts of America to realise how disastrous a lack of constraint can be. However, we have got into difficulties. We should have the wit and competence to get ourselves out, and I am sorry that we have not done so. However, a road lies through the local development plans. Ministers have considerable administrative capacity and enormous discretion in planning matters, probably more than in any other local framework, and I hope that the Minister will use his administrative capacity. I know that he thinks a great deal about the issues, and that he is sympathetic to what we are saying. I hope that, in due course, the administration of our planning laws will be satisfactory.

I welcome the speech of the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) which, to some extent, reflects what I am saying. If by any mischance he became the Minister, I hope that he would take the same good advice.

Mr. Steen: New clause 13 and amendment No. 137 are very important and I hope that the Minister will say something more helpful than what was said in Committee.

Some 10 to 20 per cent. of the country is covered by local plans—up-to-date, valid plans which govern the whole planning regime in a district. The remaining 80 per cent. of the country—I am taking a generous view, because it may be as much as 90 per cent.—does not have up-to-date valid local plans. That means that there is no consistency in planning: when one area that has no local plan decides against something and the matter goes to appeal, there is no local plan for the inspector to follow, so a different picture emerges. In one area, an inspector will find in favour of something that he finds against in another area.

Over the years, the number of appeals has increased, as will the number of inspectors. I recently asked a parliamentary question and was told that more money was being spent on planning inspectors because there were more appeals. Ultimately, the Bill will make it mandatory for every area to be covered by local plans. That will mean that, in every area, the local district council will go through the motions of discussions with parish and church councils, with neighbourhoods and with individuals. There will be local meetings at which everyone can have some input, which is to be welcomed. I commend the Government for that imaginative and constructive step, because it is the right approach.

In five years, every part of Britain will be covered by an up-to-date local plan approved by the Secretary of State. It will be a current local plan in a five-year cycle. Every five

years, the plans will be brought up to date, and in every local plan every piece of land will be designated for some purpose. There will be a development area for housing; there will be areas for agriculture, leisure and recreation, and so on. I think that, in five to 10 years' time, every part of the country will have a local plan.

7.45 pm

I am fortunate, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), because my council has a valid local plan. Indeed, we have five valid local plans which are excellent and we are updating them. There are meetings in every town and village to discuss what they should contain. However, the critical issue is that, if there is a valid local plan—or five local plans, as in South Hams—what happens when a planning applicant wants to go to appeal? The inspector who is appointed by the Secretary of State considers not only the local plan, but what is known as the PPG or planning policy guidance issued by the Department. There is often a conflict because the inspector sees the Government's PPG issued by the Department and the valid local plan—on which there has been proper consultation—with the Secretary of State's imprimatur. How does he decide how to proceed? He does not. One inspector will decide to follow the PPG and another will decide to follow the local valid plans.

New clause 13 states:

"In dealing with such an application the local authority shall first consider the provisions of the development plan."

Although that is welcome, it is hardly a major victory because it does not deal with the problem of the PPG issued by the Government. The clause states merely that the local authority should first consider the provisions of the development plan

"so far as material to the application".

That is all very well—the local authority will say that it first considered the plan and then it will either reject or approve the application. If the local authority says that it will reject the application because the local plan says that it should not be approved, and it has first considered the provisions of the plan according to new clause 13, it will say that the planning application should not be approved. However, the application may then go to appeal and the planning inspector considers it. He would need amendment No. 137, which states:

"The provisions of a current and properly constituted local development plan with an approved county structure plan shall prevail over any conflicting provisions or advice set out in planning policy guidance notes which may be issued from time to time by the Department of the Environment."

What is the point of going through the process in every district, with millions of pounds being spent and with hundreds of officials involved, if, on appeal, there is no clarity about whether the planning policy guidance note of the Secretary of State or the local plan carries sway? I believe that it must be the local plan. If not, what is the point of having a local plan? Local plans set the framework in which local decisions are taken. If, on appeal, the Secretary of State says that the planning policy guidance note says something slightly different and that he will follow that, it makes nonsense of the local plan. That is why amendment No. 137 is so important.

A former Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) answered a question that I put to him. I asked whether, if there was a local plan that said there was enough housing, the planning inspector would be bound to follow the local plan. My right hon. Friend said that that was true. The Bill does not make it clear whether the planning policy guidance notes of the Secretary of State or the local district plan, approved by the county and by the Secretary of State, are to be followed.

New clause 13, although a welcome move in the right direction, is a bit of a cop-out. It is, in effect, a non-clause. It is perfectly all right to say that the first consideration should be the local plan, but that would make no difference ultimately. On appeal, there is no clarity about what should happen and that is why I believe that amendment No. 137 is so important.

Sir Anthony Durant: I am following my hon. Friend's arguments closely and I have great sympathy with them. There is a problem in my constituency. There are local plans in my area, but a development is proposed on the edge of two local districts. There is a conflict between the developer on one side and the developer on the other side. One district says that it must have the development, but the other says that it does not want it. There is a major problem in trying to get a third bridge across the River Thames. We cannot get a third bridge across the Thames because Oxfordshire will not allow it to land. We even have a developer who is prepared to pay for the bridge, but he cannot find anywhere for it to land on the other side of the river. How does one deal with such a problem?

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend always asks good questions. It is always a pleasure to see him in his own or anyone else's place. His point is not entirely relevant to my argument, although I think that I can give him an answer. If there is a conflict between two local plans—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is the better person to give an answer, but I am acting as the Minister in this case——

Mr. Wiggin: And very well too.

Mr. Steen: I thank my hon. Friend.

If there is a conflict between two local plans, the inspector will have to decide which is right. The inspector should get cracking, because one cannot have a bridge that does not land on the other side. However, that does not affect the question whether the Government's PPGs conflict with the local plan. The PPGs are generic, whereas the local plans are detailed. In this case, if one cannot get the bridge anywhere, the local authority would appeal to the Secretary of State and the inspector would decide. That would not necessarily conflict with the PPGs. If it did, the inspector might either approve the scheme or not. We need clarity on whether preference is given to the PPGs or to the local plan. What weight does the inspector give to local plans and to the PPG?

I could give examples in my constituency where decisions have been wholly inconsistent with another decision taken a year later. I am sure that all hon. Members will have experience, as I have, of applications being made three times for the same development. The first inspector says one thing, the second says something else and the third says something else again. The problem is that there is no clarity from the Department of the Environment about whether the PPGs or the local plans take precedence.

Mr. Soley: Regional government in this country would help to resolve problems such as the bridge that goes nowhere. It would not solve them, but it would help.

The hon. Gentleman is on to an important point about amendment No. 137. We would not legislate in a confused way if we were in government. The PPGs may not necessarily be in conflict with the plan and the number of cases such as the hon. Gentleman has described may be limited, and I do not want the hon. Gentleman to play down too much the importance of new clause 13, although I must say that he is on the right lines. When we are in government and legislation is more plan-centred, I am sure that we shall be able to deliver some certainty on the issue, which he will welcome. Given his revolutionary views on planning, I imagine that it is only a matter of time before the hon. Gentleman crosses the Floor of the House. I am sure that many of his hon. Friends would also welcome some certainty.

Mr. Steen: I cannot wait for the hon. Gentleman to go into government. I will be a very old man by then.

It is worth reminding the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) who is unable to be here today, asked a telling question on 20 January 1988. It was similar to that asked by the late Member for Mid-Staffordshire, Mr. Heddle. He asked the Secretary of State when he would be

"publishing his conclusions on the draft statement of planning policy on large out-of-town shopping centres."

The Minister of State gave an interesting answer. He said:

"My right hon. Friend is publishing today two new series of guidance notes. Planning policy guidance notes (PPG) will provide guidance on general and specific aspects of planning policy, and minerals planning guidance notes (MPG) will give advice on the control of minerals development.

PPGs and MPGs aim to provide concise and practical guidance on planning policies in a clearer and more accessible form than in departmental circulars, the earlier series of development control policy notes (DCPNs), and other statements. In future, advice on legislation and procedures will be given in departmental circulars, while PPGs and MPGs will be the main source of policy guidance on planning matters.

In most cases the content of the new notes will be based on extant circulars and DCPNs. An index of all the relevant circulars is also being published today—in fulfilment of an undertaking in response to the fifth report, Session 1985-86, of the Environment Committee in the last Parliament. Unless otherwise stated in the PPGs and the MPGs, those circulars remain extant for the time being, but the need to retain them will be reviewed in the light of experience with PPGs and MPGs. DCPNs are now being withdrawn to the extent indicated in the relevant PPGs."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. *745*.]

I am sure that, although you do not have the script in front of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will understand that the answer was not very clear. If it was not clear in 1988, how can a planning inspector in 1991, faced with a local plan on the one hand and a PPG on the other, work out what he should do? Amendment No. 137 says that the local plan, if properly constituted,

"shall prevail over any conflicting provision . . . set out in planning policy guidance notes".

There must be some clarity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not fudge that issue when he answers, which I am giving him the immediate opportunity to do.

Sir George Young: This has been a useful debate about the role of the district plan. Opposition and Conservative Members have urged me to raise the profile and credibility of the district plan within the planning system. I hope to be able to say something helpful in a moment.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) implied that if we accepted new clause 13, it would be a giant step forward. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) said that the new clause did not really matter. The House will have to decide which of the two is right.

In reply to a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), I must say that, if we are to enhance the credibility of the district plan, it must be up to date. That is an important ingredient. If one faces out-of-date plans, it is difficult to say that they should be the starting point or the first consideration. District plans must be consistent with national guidance. One cannot have a series of district plans that have somehow opted out of the national planning system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) will not expect me fully to subscribe to his rather critical analysis of the planning system and to his view of the somewhat sinister motives of planning Ministers. However, I understand the import of his point that more importance should be given to the district plan if one has gone through all the procedures.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said that every local plan has to be approved by the Secretary of State. He is not quite right. Almost all such plans are now, and will still be when the Bill is enacted, adopted by the planning authority. In future, the structure plan will also be adopted by the county unless the Secretary of State calls it in.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) mentioned the problem of the bridge. If there was a conflict between two district plans, I hope that the county structure plan would pick up the fact that there was some incompatibility and would refuse to validate them. If two different counties were involved, I hope that someone in my Department would notice that there was a certain inconsistency in the approach to river crossings.

8 pm

Mr. Wiggin: I am sorry if my hon. Friend felt that I was implying that his activities were sinister. That is certainly not what I had in mind. But I am sure that he will be the first to agree that the Bill gives him substantial powers. I fully recognise that the Government should and must have a hand in the general structure planning of the nation. That is completely right. I do not understand why he is opting out of giving his approval to the structure and district plans, because that is one way in which the Government could organise the bureaucracy.

Sir George Young: If we are not happy with them, we will call them in. The fact that we do not and that we allow them to be self-approved means that we have, in effect, validated them.

Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires the local planning authority considering a planning application to have regard to the provisions of the development plan in so far as they are material to the application and to any other material considerations.

The intention of clauses 9 and 13 is to ensure that the local planning authority starts its consideration of the application by looking at the development plan. Having established that position, the authority will turn to the other material considerations.

On Second Reading, I said that we wanted the development system to be plan led and that the market

should respond to the signals given in the development plan. That has always been the fundamental principal underpinning the planning system.

If we are to go down the road of new clause 13, it is important that the development plans are up to date. But it would be wrong, within the planning law framework that has survived intact for more than 40 years, to change the status of a plan into a prescriptive document. We do not operate zoning mechanisms such as are found across the Atlantic. In our system, it is important that each planning application should continue to be considered on its merits and that all the material considerations should be weighed in the balance in reaching development control decisions.

Amendment No. 137 seeks to affect the weight attached to development plans in planning decisions. It would allow structure and local plan policies to prevail over conflicting national and regional guidance set down by the Secretary of State in his planning policy guidance notes.

Mr. Steen: That is correct. It would affect the balance. But then what is the point of having local plans?

Sir George Young: If my hon. Friend will allow me to develop my argument, I hope to persuade him that the conflict that he describes will not arise in quite the way that he envisages.

Just as we have made provision to ensure that consistency between structure plans and local plans is maintained when structure plans are updated, so it is right that we should expect planning decisions to reflect the most recent and up-to-date guidance issued at national and regional level. That must be done by properly weighing all the material considerations and taking everything that is relevant into account.

The circumstances envisaged by the amendment and by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams should not arise. Through national planning guidance, the Secretary of State aims to ensure consistency between planning at the local level and the changing requirements of national policies. The regional guidance ensures consistency on broad cross-border issues that are beyond the scope of individual structure plans.

At the point when a new up-to-date development plan comes into force, all the relevant national policies should already have been taken into account. When new national or regional policies subsequently emerge that are not in line with the plan content, it is the plan that should be regarded as out of date in that respect. The planning system will not serve us well if those new policies are to be disregarded, because they could not have been taken into account in the earlier plan preparation. Therefore, I cannot agree that amendment No. 137 is either necessary or desirable.

However, I have been looking at new clauses 9 and 13 and I have listened carefully to the arguments advanced this evening, particularly by my hon. Friends. This is not the first time that we have debated the significance and status of the development plan in considering planning applications. I recognise the concern that has been expressed. It may not be enough for us to use non-statutory guidance to emphasise that we are operating a plan-led system. Given the procedures that have to be gone through to prepare, to consult and to secure agreement for a district plan, I understand the force of the argument that we have heard this evening that the plan should be the starting point or the first consideration when one looks at the planning application. I therefore propose to concede new clause 13 when the time comes, but to resist new clause 9.

However, both new clauses are defective in that they remove the current requirement for the local planning authority to have regard to the development plan. They would also cast doubt on the way in which, for example, enforcement decisions are taken where the same wording as section 70(2) appears. I readily accept that those promoting the new clause do not intend either to downgrade the plan or to cast doubt on other procedures. Their intention is exactly the opposite.

We shall therefore need to bring forward further amendments to the new clause in another place to achieve the effect desired by its promoters. We must be careful in our amendment not to remove the flexibility in our system that allows the weights to be attached to the various considerations to be determined by the relevance and significance of those considerations.

I sympathise with all the objectives of all the hon. Members who have spoken today. The Government want the weight given to the development plan increased. The Bill will do that by ensuring that we have all the mechanisms in place to provide a comprehensive, relevant and up-to-date development plan system.

Mr. Bellotti: If you place more importance on the development plan and if, as time goes on, development or local plans cover more and more of the country, will that lead to the Department turning down more and more appeals? In particular, on this historic day when we have had the launch in Birmingham of the United Kingdom forum for young people and gambling—it is a fact that between 1984 and 1989 two thirds of all appeals made on behalf of amusement arcade owners were upheld by the Department—do you think that we can in future look forward to fewer appeals being upheld and that that forum can look forward to a happier time for young people?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is the convention of the House to refer to hon. Members in the third person.

Mr. Bellotti: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Sir George Young: I do not want to be drawn into a rather narrow debate about amusement arcades, but I hope that we will have fewer appeals as a result of there being more confidence in the local district plan. If one has local up-to-date plans covering the whole country, there will be less need for appeals. Where that exists, it may be that there is less need for the Secretary of State to intervene. I want local plans to have more credibility and the decisions to be devolved down to local authorities. I do not want my Department to have to resolve on appeal a lot of decisions that could best be taken locally.

New clause 13, suitably amended, may help all those using the planning Acts by ensuring that the right balance between the development plan and other material considerations, including national guidance, is struck.

Mr. Steen: Let me be clear. There is a local plan which is approved by the county and the district which starts on day one and lasts for five years. During those five years, the Department of the Environment will be issuing PPGs which are sent both to the district council and to the planning inspectors. If there is an appeal from the local plan to a planning inspector, he will look at the local plan

[Mr. Steen]

but will have to have first regard to any new PPG, which therefore will affect the credibility of that local plan and it will constantly be brought to a different stage by the Government introducing PPGs. The PPGs will take precedence.

Sir George Young: If national policy is changed after the preparation and adoption of the district plan, and if Parliament approves a change in national priorities, yes, the PPGs will then override a local plan. Where there are no such changes in national policy, on the scenario that I have just outlined, the local plan would be the starting point. At the end of the day, Parliament must prevail. It would be wrong for a local district plan prepared before national policy had been changed to be paramount in the circumstances that I described.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): When amendments are considered in another place, would it not be helpful to propose one to clause 13, to require that planning policy guidance notes take the form of statutory instruments? The Minister is saying that policy can be changed without Parliament being responsible or anything being brought before it. The PPGs are simply guidance notes issued by the Department without any scrutiny. If the Minister wants to keep the relationship between district plans and the PPGs, he could surely invoke Parliament's support by abandoning the quasi-legislative status of PPGs and introducing statutory instruments, so that, if right hon. and hon. Members believe that requirements are being changed surreptitiously, they can have an opportunity to scrutinise them by putting down a prayer.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting and wide-ranging point. He wants to change the way that the planning system operates by submitting the PPGs to parliamentary approval.

Mr. Wiggin: What a good idea.

Sir George Young: Whether or not it is a good idea is beside the point. That is certainly not the proposition before the House. If the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) had been more on the ball, he might have been able to table an amendment that would have done just that.

Mr. Cryer: I was waiting for the Bill to be considered in another place.

Sir George Young: The Bill has already been to another place, and the hon. Gentleman may find it difficult at this stage to do as he wishes. I must make it clear that the Government have no plans to change the present procedure. We have always regarded the development plan as important, but circular 14/85 appeared to downgrade it by referring to it as only one of the material considerations. Those days are well behind us. Today's debate should leave no doubt about the importance of the plan-led approach. For those reasons, I invite the hon. Member for Hammersmith to withdraw new clause 9, and the House to assent to new clause 13, when the time comes for it formally to be moved.

Mr. Soley: With the permission of the House, I intend to withdraw new clause 9, on the understanding that the Government will legislate according to the same principles when the Bill returns to another place. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 10

EXPLANATION OF ENFORCEMENT ACTION

"The local planning authority shall provide an explanation in writing of why it does not intend to take enforcement action if it receives a written request from any person who considers that there has been a breach of planning control.".—*[Mr. Soley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Soley: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: new clause 11—*Annual review of enforcement provisions*—

'—Every local authority shall include a review of its use of the enforcement provisions contained in the principal Act on the agenda of a full council meeting at least once a year'.'

Amendment No. 108, in clause 5, page 7, line 3, after '(1)', insert

'Without prejudice to the generality of section (Explanation of enforcement action) below'.

Amendment No. 109, in clause 10, page 14, line 44, at end insert—

'(6A) Where the local planning authority refuse an application but do not take enforcement action it shall give to any person who submits a written request an explanation in writing of why the authority does not intend to take such action.'.

Mr. Soley: New clause 10 addresses the question of enforcement. We argued on Second Reading and in Committee that the Bill is weak on enforcement, and we touched on that aspect also when debating the first group of amendments today, when a number of Conservative Members and my hon. Friends confessed concern that a local authority would be unable to enforce a plan.

We take the view that there is a need to impose a general duty of enforcement so that a local authority would have to enforce a plan, as well as be given the power to grant retrospective planning permission, to deal with exceptional cases, to avoid making the system too bureaucratic and rigid.

The Government chose to resist that proposal, so we have produced three new clauses. New clause 10 states that the local authority must give an explanation in writing as to why it does not intend to take enforcement action, and new clause 11 requires that every local authority should include a review of its use of the enforcement procedure contained in the principal Act on the agenda of a full council meeting at least once a year. Amendments Nos. 108 and 109 give substance to those arguments.

8.15 pm

The issue was spelt out in the Carnwath report, which drew attention to a survey by Jowell and Millichap, which showed that between 75 and 80 per cent. of enforcement actions were initiated by local individuals, parish councils, or local interest groups. That clearly showed that enforcement is not only of concern to local people but is something that local authorities are not willing or able effectively to address. There must be a way of insisting that a local council, as the planning authority, pays attention to the desire of local people to see planning controls enforced.

As the Government have rejected a wider and more appropriate provision, new clause 10 would at least allow a member of the public to write to a local authority asking why it had not used its enforcement powers in a particular case. That might act as something of a deterrent, and would force the authority to provide an explanation in writing, which could then be made public, taken to a local councillor, and debated in the usual democratic way.

Under new clause 11, a council would have to debate annually in full council the enforcement action that it has taken. That would provide an additional incentive to ensure that enforcement powers were taken seriously.

In Committee, and to some extent on Second Reading, great play was made of the ability of local authorities to use their enforcement powers more than they do. At least, that was the Government's view. However, we have heard today from a number of Conservative Back-Benchers that a local authority often feels helpless. One reason why planning officers wanted to introduce the criminalisation clause that would make it possible to invoke criminal law against a developer who had done something without planning permission was that their hands are tied. I regret that the Government have chosen not to take the wider and more effective approach that we wanted and proposed in Committee, but we submit the alternative, albeit weaker, proposals for the House to consider.

Mr. Vaz: Enforcement is perhaps the most important aspect of the Bill. Although the Committee, on which I served, proceeded on the basis of consensus—apart from one or two divisions on hedgerows—we feel that the Bill should be stronger and tougher, and that is particularly important in respect of enforcement.

I will mention a number of local issues that are directly related to the sentiments behind new clause 10. They concern developers who breached planning controls, and who got away with it simply because the local authority did not act quickly enough to ensure that those breaches were brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities. There is a feeling in my own constituency that the area has become a developer's paradise. Any piece of land that becomes available is snapped up for housing development.

In some cases, developers have acted in an irrational and unacceptable way. One such developer is Jelson's. It builds in different parts of the country, but has developed a lot of properties in Leicestershire. Jelson's bought bits of gardens in a part of my constituency described as Humberstone village. The firm would approach local residents and buy up bits of their gardens that were near the main road. When they had acquired enough, they would apply for planning permission to develop the area.

Exactly a year ago, Jelson's applied for planning permission to build a number of houses. The local authority turned down its application. In breach of the request of the local authority and local residents, the developers then demolished the area. They knew very well that an essential part of the local people's argument would be that the land should be used as a wildlife sanctuary, but, disregarding the direct wishes of those people, they proceeded to act in a cavalier manner.

A similar example involves Neal Brothers, another firm in my constituency——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman, or any other hon. Member, sought to rehearse a catalogue of alleged breaches of planning consent in his constituency, we should be here for a very long time. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will keep his remarks brief.

Mr. Vaz: I accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not intend to give the details of every breach of planning consent; if I did, I should be here all night, and I am sure that hon. Members will want to rush off to their television sets at 10 pm to learn the result of the Monmouth by-election. I merely wish to give one or two examples —as I said at the outset—of planning breaches, and of the time that it has taken for local authorities to act effectively.

In the case of Neal Brothers—which involved noise nuisance in the Prestwell road area of my constituency —it took the local authority many months to serve proper notices. It also took many requests from me, and from local councillors, to ensure that meetings took place with the director of planning and other officers. New clause 10 seeks to ensure that local authorities make local people aware of precisely what is happening. If people received letters explaining how long the procedures would take, that would go a long way towards reassuring them about the need for effective planning control.

Although the Government have strengthened the planning legislation and enforcement action procedures in the Bill—I am delighted that they have done so—and although we understand the jargon behind that legislation, ordinary local residents are still not aware of what is involved. That is why the explanation suggested in new clause 10 is necessary.

Finally, let me mention the case of Mr. Dawes—not one of my constituents—who lives in Tandridge, Surrey. I was not able to discover the identity of his Member of Parliament because his letter has only just arrived. The letter told me of a development in which the developers had breached planning control: heavy lorries were arriving at 1 am, and residents were arrested when they protested. Mr. Dawes says that Parliament must ensure that local authorities have powers to bring such people to book, so that local residents—the same applies to residents of my constituency, and of all constituencies—can live peacefully within the law.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Given that new clause 10 is, as far as I know, the only new clause that deals with enforcement action, I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State a question. I hope that that will be in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall try hard not to embark on a catalogue of planning cases in my constituency. I shall allude—briefly—to only one.

In his letter of 13 May to me, my hon. Friend referred to a meeting between his officials and representatives of the District Planning Officers Society which took place in Bristol on 8 April. Among other things, they discussed enforcement, and, in particular, clause 3. The society's representatives asked whether the Bill could be amended to enable a mandatory injunction to be provided by the High Court in response to an actual or threatened breach of planning control.

I understand that the officials said that they would consult the Lord Chancellor's Department, and that the Government have subsequently decided that the courts should not become involved in the detailed business of remedying breaches of planning control that should

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

properly remain the responsibility of the planning authorities. As clause 3 stands, the court is enabled only to restrain a breach of planning control.

My hon. Friend said that, in his view, the existing powers under section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972, taken together with the provisions in clause 3, gave authorities the range of injunctive powers that they were likely to need. If section 222 exists as a means of seeking remedial action, perhaps my right hon. Friend—I mean my hon. Friend; I have promoted him terribly quickly, but I am sure that it will come to him some day soon—will tell us why he thinks that circumstances like those at Gladwish farm, to which I referred on Second Reading, have arisen.

Does my hon. Friend feel that the Wealden and Rother district councils could have done something that they did not do, given the powers conferred by the 1972 Act? Did they miss that opportunity? If not, can my hon. Friend explain why they have not been able to prevent the sprouting, unsightly development at Gladwish farm? I merely seek clarification: I am not an expert, and nor, I suspect, are most members of the public. I am sure that, when they see such unsightly developments, the public feel a strong desire to know what steps can be taken by planning authorities—and should be taken, if they are on the statute book.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I do not wish to detain the House for long. I support the amendment, and press the Government not to reply that it would be "good practice" for local authorities to give writen explanations. I want them to accept that that is really necessary.

Since I began to represent the Denton part of my constituency, a fair number of constituents have come to tell me about planning disputes with their neighbours. My heart sinks when a constituent comes to me with such a story; it sinks even more when, as I show that constituent out, the next in the queue tells me firmly that he has come to complain about that constituent. I do not know whether Denton is particularly odd in this respect, but I do not seem to have had the same experience in the Stockport part of my constituency.

I have considerable sympathy for the planning officer who is called in because of a dispute between neighbours that involves a planning matter. Nice, reasonable people suddenly turn into completely unreasonable people when they are involved in such disputes. I get the impression that, on occasion, planning officers—certainly those in Tameside, who are responsible for the Denton area—who see people behaving in a way that they consider unreasonable think that the simplest option is to put their problems at the bottom of the pile, and hope that they will go away. In my experience, that is the worst way to resolve such disputes. In most cases, people must go on living next to each other, and such disputes should be concluded as quickly as possible.

One neighbour may hope, and go on hoping, that the local authority will take enforcement action. The local authority may know that perhaps it should take action against the other neighbour but hopes that the matter will go away without it doing so. That is a recipe for the conflict to continue festering between the neighbours. The neighbours then involve more and more people in their dispute.

It would be far better for the planning officer to examine the case and decide whether a breach has taken place and action needs to be taken. He should make a decision either to take action or state that although technically a breach has taken place, it is not considered sufficiently significant to require enforcement action. I press the Minister to make it clear that local authorities should not duck their responsibility. They should be required to give clear, written answers. They should state either that they intend to take enforcement action or that they do not. They should get on with resolving the matter rather than hoping that, if a long time passes, disputes between neighbours over planning matters will disappear. In my experience, they do not disappear; they simply get worse.

8.30 pm

Mr. Yeo: I shall deal with the debate in two parts. First, I shall deal with amendments Nos. 108 and 109 and new clause 10 together; then I shall come on to new clause 11.

Amendments Nos. 108 and 109 and new clause 10 would require the local planning authority to reply in writing to any written request that the authority may receive from a person who thinks that there has been a breach of planning control, to explain why it does not intend to take enforcement action. That would include any case where the authority has refused to grant a lawful development certificate, under the new section 191 contained in clause 10, in respect of an existing use.

I appreciate that the amendments are inspired by good intentions. We are all batting in the same direction. We accept that the citizen is entitled to know why local government decisions are taken. Indeed, we are very much in favour of the maximum amount of accountability. However, we cannot accept the amendments and new clause.

It is hard to imagine the circumstances in which a local planning authority would deliberately refuse to reply in writing to any reasonable written request for information about an enforcement decision. The sole exception might be the persistent, frivolous or busy-bodying correspondent —with which I am sure that hon. Members will be familiar —whose object is to create difficulties for the authority or for the owner or occupier of a site who may be falsely accused of a breach of control.

We naturally agree that all councils should respond helpfully and promptly to all requests for information about how they carry out any of their functions, not only in planning matters, but it is unnecessary to introduce a statutory requirement specifically singling out their planning enforcement activities. If any request for information is made by a member of the public, or any amenity or civic organisation, it is up to the authority to respond, to the satisfaction of the people it represents, whatever the inquiry may be.

Mr. Vaz: Does not the Minister feel that the sentiments behind the new clause square with the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister about the need for a citizens' charter giving people new rights in their dealings with local authorities?

Mr. Yeo: No, I do not. As I have just said, I believe that the majority of local authorities will respond helpfully and courteously to reasonable written requests for information about the reasons for planning decisions. I am aware from

my experience in my constituency and from discussions on planning issues with hon. Members from both sides of the House that planning issues tend to attract an element of people who are somewhat fanatical. Such people continue to correspond long after issues have been closed beyond any possible further consideration. To lay a statutory duty on the local authority, as the new clause seeks to do, would be an onerous requirement.

Mr. Soley: We all know of cases such as the Minister is thinking of, but his argument is not a good one. The new clause simply says that a reason must be given in writing. Once the local authority had given a reason in writing, it would not be required to respond to every subsequent letter. It would merely be required to make the reason clear on one occasion.

Mr. Yeo: That would be helpful in respect of repetitive requests from the same individual, but many planning issues are the subject of petitions. The availability of word processors and the ease with which circular letters can be signed may mean that hundreds, if not thousands, of requests could be made for a reason for a single decision.

Mr. Vaz: What about the rights of citizens?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) asks from a sedentary position about the rights of citizens. If an inquirer is dissatisfied with the response from the local authority or cannot obtain a reply, he or she can pursue that request with an elected representative such as a councillor or, indeed, a Member of Parliament. Alternatively, if the inquirer believes that the authority's inaction amounts to maladministration, he can arrange to have the case referred to the Commissioner for Local Administration.

Mr. Vaz: That is the whole point. To refer the matter to the ombudsman takes such a long time. However, if the authority had a statutory obligation to reply to a citizen who wrote to request an explanation, the matter could be dealt with quickly. The other avenues that the Minister suggests would add to the delay. One of the objectives of hon. Members on both sides of the House is to reduce the delays inherent in the planning legislation.

Mr. Yeo: I do not suggest that everyone should immediately have recourse to the local government ombudsman. However, there are several avenues for taking action of varying degrees of severity and importance. They are open to anyone who feels that the local authority is not responding in a helpful or responsible manner. There have been cases in which the local ombudsman has been willing to criticise maladministration in planning enforcement matters. In some cases, financial compensation has been recommended for people who suffered injustice as a result of a local authority's inaction.

It is clear from what I have said that the Government believe that the amendments are unnecessary, and they might result in unprofitable use of the scarce resources of planning authorities. Indeed, in earlier debates today and in Committee, anxieties were expressed by both Conservative and Opposition Members that local authorities are in some cases fully stretched by their enforcement role. Therefore, we must be mindful of the need to avoid imposing any unnecessary burdens on them. Local authorities might have to divert resources which would have been more effectively used for direct enforcement action.

We do not have evidence that councils are reluctant or refuse to explain why they decided not to take enforcement action. Needless to say, that does not imply that the explanation given always satisfies the person who seeks it. I hope that, for the reasons that I have given, the Opposition will consider it right to withdraw their amendment so that we can leave the matter to the sense of the elected members and the officers of the authority involved.

New clause 11 would require the full council of every local planning authority, at least once a year, to review the way in which the authority exercises the enforcement provisions in part VII of the 1990 Act, as they will be amended by the Bill.

We appreciate that this amendment is intended to keep local authorities on their toes in enforcement matters—an objective that we share. We accept that councils ought to monitor their procedures for taking planning enforcement action, but we believe that councils should exercise discretion about how best to do so. We do not believe that Parliament should impose on every local authority the statutory extra burden that the amendment involves.

There is apparently no good reason for singling out the planning enforcement provisions in this way and treating them differently from other local government functions. Nor is it essential, or appropriate, for the full council to conduct the proposed review. The council's planning committee, which has the day-to-day experience, might be a better review mechanism. If it is felt that some overview is needed, the council's policy and resources committee might be as well suited to the task, especially if priority in the use of scarce materials is one of the factors to be taken into consideration.

The House will know that all councils have adequate powers under the Local Government Act 1972 to delegate powers to officers. It seems unnecessary to impose a further statutory duty on authorities, when members or officers can already carry out regular reviews of their functions to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness. There are already strong financial pressures on councils to operate efficiently and to be accountable to their electorate.

During discussion of some of the enforcement amendments in Standing Committee, to which the hon. Member for Hammersmith referred, I undertook that we would issue a planning policy guidance note about enforcement policy. We aim to issue this note after consultation on a draft to coincide with the commencement of the new enforcement powers in clauses 1 to 11. This will give local authorities a further stimulus to examine their use of these provisions and, if necessary, to strengthen and improve their practical operation.

We understand that Opposition Members and, indeed, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, which inspired some of these concerns, want to see an effective enforcement regime in place in every local authority area. That is an objective that we entirely share. However, we think that the nannying approach of the amendment is inappropriate. I therefore hope that hon. Members will not press it further.

I owe a response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), who posed a very specific inquiry. I have to be careful about any comment on the

[Mr. Yeo]

case that he raised, lest there be any outstanding enforcement appeals. We think that it might have been possible for Wealden district council to seek an injunction under the 1972 Act. Indeed, that may still be practicable. If my hon. Friend wants a more detailed response, I shall be happy to write to him and, if necessary, place a copy of the reply in the Library.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) raised a number of cases that he had mentioned during the Second Reading debate. However, he also dredged up a new one. I can tell him that Tandridge is represented by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). It is very easy to establish which constituencies various places are in, and it would have been a courtesy to inform my right hon. and learned Friend that the matter would be raised.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 30, Noes 112.

Division No. 147] **[8.41 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Kirkwood, Archy
Bellotti, David	McAvoy, Thomas
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Meale, Alan
Boateng, Paul	Nellist, Dave
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Pike, Peter L.
Cox, Tom	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Cryer, Bob	Prescott, John
Dixon, Don	Sillars, Jim
George, Bruce	Skinner, Dennis
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Soley, Clive
Gordon, Mildred	Spearing, Nigel
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*	Wallace, James
Harman, Ms Harriet	Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Haynes, Frank	
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and**
Kennedy, Charles	**Mr. Keith Vaz.**

NOES

Alexander, Richard	Dunn, Bob
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Fox, Sir Marcus
Amos, Alan	Freeman, Roger
Arbuthnot, James	Gale, Roger
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Ashby, David	Goodlad, Alastair
Baldry, Tony	Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Bellingham, Henry	Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Benyon, W.	Hague, William
Bevan, David Gilroy	Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Bottomley, Peter	Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Hawkins, Christopher
Bowis, John	Hayes, Jerry
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard	Heyhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Hayward, Robert
Brazier, Julian	Hind, Kenneth
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Budgen, Nicholas	Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Burt, Alistair	Hunter, Andrew
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*	Irvine, Michael
Carrington, Matthew	Jack, Michael
Chapman, Sydney	Janman, Tim
Chope, Christopher	Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*	Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Cope, Rt Hon John	Kirkhope, Timothy
Couchman, James	Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina	Knowles, Michael
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*	Lightbown, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James	Maclean, David
Mans, Keith	Sims, Roger
Maude, Hon Francis	Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin	Speller, Tony
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick	Stanbrook, Ivor
Mills, Iain	Steen, Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*	Stevens, Lewis
Moate, Roger	Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Moss, Malcolm	Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin	Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Neubert, Sir Michael	Twinn, Dr Ian
Nicholls, Patrick	Viggers, Peter
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*	Waller, Gary
Norris, Steve	Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Page, Richard	Warren, Kenneth
Paice, James	Watts, John
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil	Wilshire, David
Patnick, Irvine	Winterton, Mrs Ann
Porter, David *(Waveney)*	Winterton, Nicholas
Powell, William *(Corby)*	Wolfson, Mark
Rathbone, Tim	Wood, Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert	Yeo, Tim
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard	Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Sackville, Hon Tom	
Shaw, David *(Dover)*	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*	**Mr. Tim Boswell and**
Shersby, Michael	**Mr. Nicholas Baker.**

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 12

GENERAL DUTY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

'It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State and local planning authorities in discharging any of their functions under this Act to have regard to the desirability of securing sustainable development.'.—*[Mr. Win Griffiths.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 132, in clause 14, page 24, line 4, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Mr. Griffiths: Before we consider the new clause, for the sake of clarity, I wish to underline our welcome for a number of the important steps that the Government have made by seeking to introduce some environmentally important matters into the Bill. However, virtually all of them were introduced after pressure from some Conservative Back Benchers as well as the Opposition—for example, the introduction of environmental assessment, the concession which the Government have just made on development plan priority and the important step which I mentioned earlier on interim development orders, when I underlined that we thought that the Government had not gone far enough.

We are in a similar position on sustainable development. The Government took on board a number of important environmental considerations, but unfortunately they were not prepared to move when we tried to press several matters which would have further improved the Bill in Committee. Yet the previous Secretary of State is on record as saying:

"The planning system is in many ways the most effective tool of environmental management available to us."

We agree with what the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) had to say about the planning system.

We know that public concern about the environment is increasing and we were hoping that when the Bill first came to the Lords the Government would have been leading the way by introducing environmental considerations into the

planning process. However, in Committee we found that, when we wanted to place an environmental duty on local planning authorities, the Government were not prepared to take that on, even though, in nine other instances, such a duty had been placed on other bodies through legislation.

The Government were not prepared to take a further step, from introducing environmental assessments for specific planning proposals, to get local authorities to use environmental assessment techniques when drawing up structure plans, even though there have been preliminary proposals for such developments through European legislation.

The Government were not prepared to require local authorities to survey the natural resources within their area —water, minerals and the use of energy; nor were they prepared to accept the inclusion of policies for the conservation of energy and natural resources in development plans. The Government were not prepared to extend to other areas of environmental concern the present requirements for local authorities to use planning permission to minimise the impact of development on trees.

We have been considering some other way which we think will be consonant with the Government's declared objective. We hope that we have found it in the amendment, and that they will be willing to accept greater concern for environmental matters in the planning process. We want to place a general duty on local authorities to have regard to the benefits of securing sustainable development, which is in line with the Government's previously declared objectives. A precedent in the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill states that Scottish Natural Heritage

"shall have regard to the desirability of securing that anything done, whether by SNH or any other person, in relation to the natural heritage of Scotland is undertaken in a manner which is sustainable."

The concept of sustainable development has been with us for some years. It is at the heart of much national and international thinking on environment policy and was the key plank of the Brundtland report, "Our Common Future", which gives a definition of sustainable development as

"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Sustainable development is not a policy of no growth but a policy that says that growth is necessary and desirable, provided it can be done in a sustainable way. Economic development must be matched to the environmental and other resources that are available. In their response to the Brundtland report, the Government expressly accepted that principle and said that the Government

"fully intends to continue building on this approach and further to develop policies consistent with the concept of sustainable development."

The Government confirmed the relevance of the planning system to sustainable development by stating that the United Kingdom's planning legislation had already put in place some of the policies needed to achieve it.

Introducing the Government's response to the report, the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), said:

"At the Toronto Summit last month, I joined with my fellow Heads of State or Government in endorsing the concept of sustainable development, the central message of the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development—Our Common Future . . . The message from the Toronto Summit echoed the Report's call for environmental considerations to be taken into account in all areas of economic policy making."

9 pm

That was in July 1988, but the Government's positive approach to sustainable development was reaffirmed in the environment White Paper which was published last September. That document identified it as the foundation of policy making, and said:

"The starting point for this Government is the ethical imperative of stewardship . . . We have a moral duty to look after our planet and to hand it on in good order to future generations. That is what the experts mean when they talk of 'sustainable development': not sacrificing tomorrow's prospects for a largely illusory gain today."

We must put a proper value on the natural world. It would be odd to cherish a Constable but not the landscape that he depicted. The foundation stone of all the policies in the White Paper is our responsibility to future generations to preserve and enhance the environment of our country and our planet. Statements made several times by the Government show that they wish to take initiatives to further the achievement of sustainable development and that they recognise the role of the planning system in achieving those aims.

We hope that the Government will give new clause 12 a fair wind, as it would be crucial in helping them to further their aims. Although we have had no indication of their thinking on the matter, given its background and their statements made in support of the concept of sustainable development, we hope that they will accept the new clause and place a general duty on local authorities to have regard to sustainable development when considering all planning matters.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I do not want to detain the House long, as many hon. Members wish to return to their constituencies. We all cherish our constituencies, and when one considers what has happened in the past 15 years we learn to cherish them even more. My constituency is still beautiful and contains a large area of outstanding natural beauty. The scale of development leads me to conclude that new clause 12 is well worth supporting, for the reasons so eloquently expressed by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

Too often in the past, people have opposed development in areas of natural beauty because they suffer from the NIMBY—"not in my backyard"—syndrome. That has been true in the past 15 or 20 years, when we have seen an explosion in development. It is only natural that people should want to protect what they believe is their special view or their special environment, but there are much wider considerations, as we learn to cherish and treasure what we still have left of our environment. It is concern for those considerations that motivates me, and I believe that I speak on behalf of many of my constituents as they watch the extent and pace of development, which not only may be ugly from an architectural point of view but may jeopardise the environment itself.

As development proceeds apace, our roads become congested. Our infrastructure—our schools and railways —become inadequate. That puts pressure on other Government Departments and on councils responsible for budgets in respect of private development and education.

Mr. Speed: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in his part of the world and mine, the shortage of water represents a very real constraint on such widespread development?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made that point, of which, as an angler, I am

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

well aware. One has only to look around at some of our reservoirs in the south-east and to note the fall in the water table to realise that we are placing in serious jeopardy the water supply that future generations will enjoy.

I shall not elaborate. I think that I have made my point, and I merely ask the Government to respond.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I happened to come through the constituency of the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) yesterday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I merely went through and admired it on my way to somewhere else. I understand the hon. Gentleman's attachment to preserving what is best about Sussex and many other counties.

The Government could easily incorporate the important statement of principle that is proposed. In doing so, they would not merely confirm the statements that they have made about the general attitude that should govern all environmental policies; they would add something practical to planning legislation.

At the moment, the duties in planning law fall on the Secretary of State—on the Government—or on local authorities. As I understand it, there is nothing in current planning law that requires that all the various jobs done by Ministers in exercising their powers and by local authorities should be compatible with the aim of upholding sustainable development.

For example, it is not a prerequisite of the function of a local authority in drawing up a unitary development plan that all the policies therein should be compatible with sustainable development. When a local authority considers a planning application, whether for mineral extraction, for building a reservoir, or for a housing or industrial development, it is not a requirement that it must take account of the concept of sustainability. Similarly, it is not a requirement of Secretaries of State, in deciding planning applications that are remitted to them, that they should decide whether those applications are consistent with sustainability.

If we write such a requirement into law, we shall be filling a gap. It is no good saying that Ministers and local authorities will impute that requirement to the legislation because, if they do not, there is nothing that anyone can do by way of redress; there can be no argument.

There are obvious practical examples. I am not sure whether there have been such examples in Sussex, but there was a controversial case not long ago in Oxfordshire—very near, in fact, to the constituency of the Secretary of State for the Environment. It was proposed to build a large new residential development in the middle of the Oxfordshire countryside. The compatibility of such a proposal with sustainable development raises all sorts of proper questions. For example, is such a development near existing transport routes or will further routes have to be built to service the new town, whether near Henley or near Thame, perhaps with the countryside being destroyed in their wake?

We are talking not only about a statement of principle but about the Government's general commitment, which they now have a chance to enshrine in legislation. It is not just, as the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) rightly reminded the House, that the Government have already adopted, in legislation that has gone through the House in this Session of Parliament in the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, a very similar set of words reflecting the concept of sustainability. It is a test, in one of the most practical areas, of doing something about it.

The planning law, the powers that we give to those able to influence the planning of our communities, the structural planning of what is built, what is destroyed and the rest, require sustainability. It is no good believing that we can have sustainable economics—from which the Government are still a long way removed—or a sustainable transport or energy policy, unless the simple step is first taken of having a sustainable planning policy reflecting sustainable development.

So, without knowing exactly what the Government will offer in defence, it is anticipated that it will be said that this is unnecessary because structure plans and guidance issued by the Secretary of State will not make specific legislation a requirement. If that is to be the Minister's answer, I must say that it is not explicitly in legislation, it does not explicitly govern the duties on local and central Government and it is not necessarily enough that it is in guidance notes in read-between-the-lines script. If we cannot have it here, the Government will go into the next election—it is not a point that is any more advantageous to me than it is disadvantageous to the hon. Member for Wealden—with the accusation able to be made against them that they had an opportunity to state and implement their commitment to sustainability but did not take it.

Even if it requires the Minister to throw away his present speech and concede that it is a good idea, that he is under pressure and that the Government should have said yes, I hope that he will so concede.

Mr. Steen: I believe that it is recognised on this side of the House that, for the first time in 20 years, a major planning Bill has come before the House. I resent the view expressed by many of my hon. Friends and colleagues that the Bill should be speeded up because we all want to go home. We do not want to go home. This is a very important debate about a very important matter which affects millions of people in the south and the north of this country. Constituents all over Britain will be affected by this planning Bill. It is a very important Bill and I find it extremely disappointing that the Government are so intransigent as to say that no changes can be made. The Government should be making changes and this is a very important series of amendments.

The new clause tabled by the Opposition talks about sustainable development. It is a matter that has been discussed for the past five or six years as the earth's resources have become scarcer. At the same time, amendment 132 in the name of some of my hon. Friends deals with page 24, line 4, of the Bill and asks the Secretary of State to change the word "may" to "shall", so that the Secretary of State shall make regulations to ensure that the environmental impact is considered by planning committees. How harmless that would be, and how important it would be to constituents all over the country who feel that the planning committee and the planning officials are not giving sufficient emphasis to the effect of development on the environment.

It is all very well having local plans—we all agree that local plans are a good thing. It is all very well having PPGs and saying that they keep the thing running and take precedence over the local plan. But why can there not be

in local plans a recognition of the environmental impact of building houses and ruining green field sites? Why cannot the environmental consequences be considered?

Why are the Government so resistant to any change whatsoever in this Bill? This is an opportunity that may not occur for another 10 years for the Government, being concerned about the environment, to take a lead instead of always acting because the EC has said that action must be taken. The EC has said that the environmental impact is important. Clause 14 says that the Government may introduce regulations when considering the environmental effects of developments. Why not take a lead and change "may" to "shall"?

Dr. Godman: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we in Scotland are familiar with environmental impact assessments of developments, particularly developments involving the offshore and onshore oil and gas industries.

9.15 pm

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. There is nothing new about what is proposed and the Minister may say that it is not needed, but the House may take a different view, and I urge the Minister to take advantage of being able to say, as we cannot say, that he considers this important, that he is concerned for the Government's reputation of being concerned with green issues and that he is anxious to do something about it. My instinct tells me that he will not do that, and I want to know why.

I want to be able to tell my constituents why, in towns such as Ivybridge, which has grown from 1,500 to 13,000 people today, there are not sufficient school places, why the police do not have sufficient police cover, and why the leisure facilities are inadequate. That state of affairs exists not because South Hams district council has not done a fine job, but because the local authority has not had the resources to deal with, nor was any assessment made of the impact on the environment and infrastructure of, that speed of development.

The town of Roborough, just outside Plymouth, was built first and then thought was given to what the town needed, such as a police station, a school and health care. The amendment would make sure that before local authorities gave planning permission, regard would be given to whether there was enough water for the people, whether the electricity company could cope with providing power to the new homes and whether the gas board and all the other services could provide the necessary facilities.

The little town of Kingsbridge in South Devon was built so quickly that the electricity substation could not cope. The public house at Stokenham, five miles away, is constantly being plunged into darkness because the electricity supply cannot be maintained. It may be romantic occasionally to dine by candelight, but the owner of that public house finds life intolerable. He cannot cook meals because he cannot rely on having power, and often he is unable to see his customers. He has candles constantly burning because the electricity substation cannot cope. That is the environmental impact argument at work.

If local authorities were told that before agreeing to allow more houses to be built, even if they are included on the local plan, they must ensure that public services can be provided, many difficulties would be avoided. For example, they must ensure that the necessary school places are available for the kids who will live in the new homes. Such an approach would result from changing "may" to "shall" in clause 14.

Many of my hon. Friends and I want a firming up of the Government attitude to regulating the speed at which development takes place. If there is a defect in the amendment, at least let the Minister agree to do something about the problem with which it attempts to deal. A prior consideration to all development, even if it is in the local plan, must be the ability of the infrastructure to cope with it. That must be a priority.

I apologise to the House for speaking for so long, but the matter is of great interest to me, to my constituents and, as can be seen by the number of hon. Members present, to many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I shall give three examples in support of the new clause. The first is in an area of my constituency that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know well —Audenshaw. However, I suspect that if you returned to your childhood area, you would find amazing changes. Over the past five or six years, many open spaces have been built on because the local authority has had to agree to planning applications from local builders because it had no reason to turn them down. It turned down a couple of applications, but the builders appealed against the decision and won their case.

The result of all that building is that Audenshaw now has insufficient places in the local primary schools to accommodate the children from the new housing developments. Some of the schools in Audenshaw are fairly old—at least two of the primary schools date back to before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, attended schools in the area—and can no longer cope with the large influx of children.

The local authority could not have turned down the planning applications for new houses on the basis that it would have insufficient places in the schools to cater for the increased population. It must now cope with the ridiculous position of no longer having enough suitable land on which to build new schools. Other areas within Audenshaw have been put under stress as a result of the substantial number of houses that have been built in the area. The local authority should have had the opportunity to consider how many extra houses Audenshaw could take and what other facilities should be put in place before the houses were built.

My second example is the development of supermarkets and do-it-yourself garden centres in Greater Manchester. Planning permission has now been granted to so many such establishments on the south and east sides of Manchester that they are no longer sustainable. Their success will certainly be to the detriment of groups of shops on housing estates and corner stores, on which the elderly and disabled rely because they cannot drive to the large supermarkets for their shopping.

The approval of planning permission for so many large stores means that some of them, inevitably, will not survive. It may be the philosophy of the Conservative party that such competition is perfectly all right and that it is perfectly acceptable if some stores close down in the future, leaving abandoned and derelict sites. It is not acceptable to me. Planning authorities should be able to take account of how many supermarkets and garden centres are sustainable in an area without reorganising the infrastructure to take account of competitive demands.

Mr. Steen: If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, he is saying that local plans should be approved and enforced but that the pace of development in an area should be gauged by the planning committee, according to how much development can be sustained.

Mr. Bennett: We should not allow the overprovision of shopping in a district because it will inevitably mean that some of the shops cannot be sustained, which will have a major impact on different groups of people. If local shops on housing estates close, car owners probably do not have a problem, but pensioners and those without cars, such as the disabled, have a major problem. That means that the local authority or another organisation will have to try to obtain home helps to do the shopping for the elderly, which will have considerable cost implications for the local authority. I could develop that point at some length, but I am trying to be brief.

I deeply regret that the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill became an Act. I hope that we do not see any more such private Bills. I fear that, with Government proposals for the privatisation of ports and if private business procedure is reformed, a series of planning applications for the development of some of the ports affected by the ports legislation could come before local authorities. One can make out a case for almost all those ports to expand, not on the basis that this country is to have more imports and exports going through its ports, but simply because one port can take business away from another port.

There should be a limit to that sort of competition, particularly if it means that, each time one of the ports wants to expand, it has to take up a piece of estuary or mudflat—natural habitat that is already in scarce supply. We must make some attempt to look at this country as a whole. We must consider the level of dock development necessary for the country to be sustained and once we have reached that level, we should say that, although it may be nice for Hartlepool, Felixstowe or Southampton to take trade from each other, we do not want competition so that one port takes trade from another, a little bit more estuary disappears and more dockland becomes derelict. We want a sustainable, planned level of port activity, which minimises the amount of natural environment that is destroyed and offers this country some prospect of sustainable development to protect our natural environment for future generations—as outlined in the White Paper.

Mr. Cryer: New clause 12 is of great importance, because development should be sustainable. However, at present, local authority planning committees cannot use that as a relevant factor when making decisions on planning consent. If local councillors say to their officials, "Let's see if this development is sustainable in secure financial terms before we consider giving consent to the developers, so that we are not left with a half-completed development and a pile of rubble on our hands, with the local authority left to pick up the pieces," the officials will almost certainly reply that that is not a planning matter. They will probably say, "If you councillors decide that planning consent should be deferred, the developer may say that that is deemed as refusal and go to court for a judicial review." No one wants to become involved in that procedure, because it is expensive and weighs heavily on the local authorities.

In Bradford, the west end development scheme started off as a fairly modest development involving about £60 million, but the cost has now increased to £300 million and the project includes the proposed demolition and conversion of a perfectly good multiscreen cinema of long-standing—now called the Odeon, formerly the New Victoria—and the part or whole demolition of a co-operative shop based on the designs of Eric Mendelson. The cognoscenti will know that Mendelson was a distinguished pre-war architect who developed a clean, classical, functional, modern line, of which the Bradford Sunwin house co-operative store remains a splendid but isolated national example.

The local authority decided that a firm called 3Ds Ltd. should be the developer. The company has 100 £1 shares, which does not seem to be the soundest basis on which to embark on a development of about £300 million. The company has made it absolutely clear that it depends on city grant for the sustainability of the development but city grant is not negotiated with the local authority, as the Minister knows. The local authority is excluded from the negotiations, which are conducted exclusively between Department of the Environment officials and the developer. Therefore, if the developer is not sustained—let us suppose that the Department of the Environment misjudges and the project falls—who picks up the pieces? The local authority picks up the pieces, but it has been excluded from the beginning. If it raises the question of the sustainability of the development, it is not allowed to pursue it, which is why the new clause is important.

9.30 pm

Let us consider another aspect of city grant and sustainability. Let us suppose, as in the west end scheme in Bradford, that the developer says that he needs £40 million. That is almost all the city grant award, which currently runs at £65 million or £60 million. Let us suppose that, as in this case, the developer has stitched up a deal with Department of Environment officials who say that they cannot award £40 million now but will do so over a period of years. The only application being considered at the time is £5 million of city grant. The Department of the Environment will not answer questions relating to the rest of the £35 million application.

City grant's criteria require housing to be incorporated, but the first section that has been applied for does not include housing. Therefore, it would be reasonable for the local authority to inquire whether the Department of the Environment will give city grant to incorporate housing and to fulfill the criteria in future "tranches"—a buzz word in these affairs—of city grant. However, the Department of the Environment will not even say whether any other applications are being considered, so the sustainability of the project must be open to question.

If the local authority raised the issue of the sustainability of the rolling programme to complete the £300 million development—I am fairly sure, but not certain, that it did—it would be told that that was not a planning aspect to be taken into consideration. After all, if planning consent is given, 3Ds Ltd. might sell it the next day to another developer. In that limited, narrow context, this is not a relevant factor, but it should be because development in the city of Bradford should benefit the people of Bradford. The local authority should be able to scrutinise developments and to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that the finance is there.

What is even more worrying is the fact that, of the 100 £1 shares of 3Ds Ltd., 30 are issued to a firm called Old

Court Ltd., which is registered in Guernsey. I made a request that the planning committee should inquire into the firm to find out why one third of the shares were held in secret, with a complete lack of accountability. Does the firm have adequate resources? What is the financial position, and can the firm sustain the development and ensure that the local authority is not left with piles of rubble from the demolition work in the first phase because the firm has gone into liquidation? Although my letter was read out to the planning committee, I was told that it was not a planning matter and that those points would not be taken into account.

The secret of the 30 £1 shares remained, until I saw the March issue of *Labour Research*, in which there was an article on firms profiting from pornography. It listed a number of companies involved in pornographic publications. One is a firm called Old Court Ltd., registered in Guernsey, which produces *Penthouse* and *Forum*. It lists another firm called Power Radio Ltd., whose publications include *Cheap Thrills* and *Electric Blue*.

In the first phase of development, there is an Omnimax cinema. I wonder what sort of cinema the developers have in mind, in view of the background information. Such information should have been available to the planning committee so that it could examine scrupulously, as it wished to, the sustainability of the west end scheme.

Although some modest infill development in the west end of Bradford may be possible and desirable, the £300 million scheme, with the demolition of a splendid cinema and a perfectly well-designed co-operative shop is neither desirable nor needed. One aspect of scrutiny is consideration by the planning committee of the local authority, which includes elected representatives to exercise a degree of control. If the new clause is not accepted, that possibility remains limited.

I have raised strong reservations about the west end scheme. I have been informed that there will be scrutiny at the planning stage. However, because of the narrow interpretation of what planning scrutiny is, the scrutiny by the local authority, especially in association with city grant—the Government have deliberately cut out local authorities from the discussion process—is limited.

I hope that all aspects can be taken into fair account in the planning committee's meetings, which are open to the general public. I hope that councillors will have the fullest information so that they can be guided on a wider basis by local authority officials. For that to happen, the new clause will have to be accepted. That would help local democracy, rather than hinder it and it would help planning procedures rather than hinder them.

On a wider basis, as hon. Members of all parties have said, important environmental decisions could be taken into account so that developments are sustainable. Planning decisions should not be dealt with in the short term, with local authorities often having to pick up the pieces because planning decisions are translated into schemes that are not sustainable.

Sir George Young: This has been a useful debate on environmental matters, in which a number of hon. Members have displayed their environmental credentials. I speak as a paid-up member of the Ealing branch of Friends of the Earth. With my wife, I am being sponsored on a tandem ride to Hever castle later this month to raise funds for a friendly and earthy group of people.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) welcomed some of the moves that the Government have made in the Bill, although he said that we could have gone further. When we have resisted amendments, it has often not been because we oppose what the hon. Gentleman is trying to do. We have simply found better ways of doing it than putting it into primary legislation. Often the difference has been on the means rather than on the ends.

I listened to the moving speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). We all have a responsibility to hand over our constituency—I hope that it will not be for a long time in his case—in the same beautiful condition in which we inherited it. He developed a theme, which was echoed by other hon. Members, that, when one makes a district plan, each ingredient, such as housing, education, water and sewerage should be consistent with the others.

In a sense, the whole point of having a district plan is so that one does not build housing in isolation. One has a five-year plan that sets out the demands of the various statutory undertakers so that one has a planned cohesive development. I will say in a moment or two what we outline in PPG3 about infrastructure and the problems of reconciling all the different parts. I would not dissent from the general thesis of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I shall make a point of saying in a few moments that the amendment is unnecessary, because I know that he would be disappointed if I did not use those words.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) accused the Government of being intransigent. He is unfair in this case. His amendment No. 132 is an amendment to clause 14, which the Government included in the Bill in response to pressure in Committee—a concession from the Government on environmental assessment which my hon. Friend seeks to drive a stage further. So perhaps that is not the best example to allege that the Government are intransigent.

I listened to the points made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). He said that there should be a coherent approach so that all the infrastructure pieces fall neatly into place. I think that I am right in saying that the House is looking at the relationship between environmental assesment and private Bills.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), in an ingenious speech, developed the word "sustainability" in a sense that no one else had suggested. He spoke of financial sustainability, while everyone else was talking about environmental sustainability. In a sense, he may have done some damage to those tabling the amendments simply by casting doubt on what is meant by sustainability.

At first glance, new clause 12 appears beguiling and unexceptionable. As an expression of principle, I could not find fault with it. Indeed, as has already been pointed out, in the environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance" last year, the Government made clear their view that the concept of sustainable developments must guide our approach to the custody and use of the world's resources.

On a general level, the term "sustainable development" can be defined in a number of ways. The White Paper described sustainable development as

"living on the earth's income rather than eroding its capital . . . keeping the consumption of renewable natural resources within the limits of their replenishment"

and

[Sir George Young]

"handing down to successive generations not only man-made wealth . . . but also natural wealth, such as clean and adequate water supplies, good arable land, a wealth of wild life and ample forests."

In other words, we should not sacrifice tomorrow's prospects for a largely illusory gain today.

The Brundtland report, "Our Common Future", quoted by the hon. Member for Bridgend, defines the principle in similar terms as

"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

I suspect that all hon. Members would accept those as general acceptable descriptions of the principle. But even laudable general principles do not always translate well into legislation, and I think that that was the case here. The difficulty arises when we consider just how the requirement in the new clause would work in practice on a day-to-day basis.

Local planning authorities are already statutorily required, when dealing with planning applications, to have regard to the material provisions of the development plan and to all other material considerations. Schedule 3 provides that local plans must include policies for conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the land, and for improving the physical environment. Every development proposal will therefore be considered in the context of those policies.

New clause 12 would introduce a wholly new element into the determination of every development proposal. Each planning application would be subjected to the test of whether it secured sustainable development. That would substantially and unacceptably unbalance the planning system, conflicting with the thesis on which it has always operated—that development proposals should be allowed unless they would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance.

The hon. Member for Bridgend mentioned the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill which contains a similar provision to that suggested here. That is designed to guide the actions of a particular body—Scottish Natural Heritage. Because it has a statutory duty to weigh all material considerations before reaching a decision on a planning application, the position of the local authorities and the Secretary of State is different from that of Scottish Natural Heritage, which has a narrower remit.

In practice, as we have seen from the debate just now, new clause 12 would attract differing interpretations of what sustainable development means. It would leave much room for subjective assessments, not only by decision-makers but by those affected by proposed development. That would be likely to lead to many more unresolved conflicts of opinion and an increase in the number of planning appeals. Some local planning authorities could use the proposed new provision unscrupulously to prevent development that they wanted to block for any reason.

One could argue that any development that uses aggregates is not a sustainable development because there is a finite supply of aggregates. There is difficulty in saying to an authority that, with each application, it must—whatever the terms of the new clause—have regard to the desirability of securing suitable sustainable development. One could use that to knock out almost any development.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister knows that the concerns that he expressed can be met by planning guidance or planning circulars. If the Government make a statement of principle in the Bill, as they have in planning legislation since the war, it can be amplified and clarified by circulars and guidance—which can be the subject of consultation before being issued. Individual decisions would then be compatible with that general requirement, and a local authority would not need to have regard to sustainability as one of the requirements that it must observe. The Minister did not cite an existing example, and I suspect that that is because none exists.

9.45 pm

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that local authorities should have a general duty to promote sustainable development, that is a thesis with which we can all agree. However, new clause 12 suggests that it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State and of local planning authorities, in discharging any of their functions, to have regard to the desirability of sustainable development. A local authority could use that to reject any development it chose, on the ground that it was not sustainable.

Mr. Hughes *indicated dissent.*

Sir George Young: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey shakes his head, but if one includes such a provision in primary legislation, local planning authorities will have a perfect opportunity to block just about anything they wanted.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Is not the Minister using an extreme example? He knows that such a practice would quickly be countered by planning guidance from his Department, if needed. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) suggested the use of a statutory instrument procedure as a way of keeping us all involved in the process. The Minister is trying to excuse himself from accepting what he knows to be a perfectly good principle, by citing an extreme example.

Sir George Young: I have made it clear that I have no difficulty with the principle. The Government have already signed up to it—I quoted the White Paper. The hon. Gentleman is on dangerous ground when he suggests that it does not matter if the legislation is slightly wrong, because it could be corrected by guidance. The whole thrust of the debate earlier today was that a number of my hon. Friends do not like the prospect of the Government using PPGs to change the planning system. The hon. Member for Bridgend must make up his mind whether he wants the Government to put things right by way of PPGs, or whether he is more interested in putting sensible legislation on the statute book.

I sympathise with the aim underlying the new clause. The Government wholeheartedly support the concept of sustainable development—we are on record as saying so. Such an expression of general principle is useful to inform and guide the development of Government policy on environment matters. However, the new clause would give rise to intractable practical difficulties. Its apparent innocuousness is deceptive. Whatever is put on the statute book must have a discernible intention, and interpretation of the clause would inevitably be open to abuse.

Mr. Steen: If the Minister cannot accept sustainable development, does he not agree that clause 14—which, as he pointed out, the Government inserted, and for which I am grateful—provides an easier way to proceed? It provides, very simply, that the Secretary of State may

make regulations about the environmental impact of any proposed development. He need merely change the word "may" to "shall", and get on with it.

Sir George Young: Perhaps I can get on with it and deal with amendment 132, which requires the Secretary of State to make regulations under clause 14. As I said a moment ago, clause 14 was added in Committee, following careful consideration of the points made in several debates on environmental assessment in another place, and by hon. Members on both sides of this House on Second Reading. The clause provides an enabling power under which the Secretary of State can make regulations requiring environmental assessment of classes of development before planning permission is granted. Such regulations may make provision similar to that made in the regulations under the European Communities Act 1972, which implement the EC directive on environmental assessment.

We agreed to the inclusion of the clause because we support the principle that, where a development project is likely to have significant environmental effects, those effects ought to be assessed before the project is permitted to go ahead, and because we also accept that the existing Community directive may not cover all kinds of project that are likely to have significant environmental effects, and which ought therefore to be the subject of assessment. But the coverage of the EC directive, and of the implementing regulations, is very full, so we do not expect it to be necessary to cover many types of project in regulations under the clause. If hon. Members consult "Environmental Assessment: A Guide to the Procedures", and the annexes in particular, they will note that most of the developments to which environmental assessment is appropriate are already included. The types are set out at the back. The reason why we included that is that some projects may fall outside it.

It is too early to say what kinds of project might be included in regulations under the clause. That is why we prefer the permissive option to the compulsion suggested in the amendment.

We have undertaken that the Government will consult those concerned before making such regulations. A number of suggestions have been made both in this House and in another place, and we will of course be looking at them. The principal criteria must be whether projects of the types in question are likely to have significant environmental effects, and whether they are already covered by the existing directive. The scope of the directive is, after all, very wide and the types of project that it covers already require assessment by virtue of the regulations implementing it.

A final consideration relates to activities that are subject to the internationally competitive market. Our objective is to maintain a level playing field throughout the Community and in such cases we would aim to agree an amendment to the directive rather than to take unilateral action under clause 14.

I have tried to explain why we cannot go along with the new clause, although we subscribe to the philosophy behind it. I have also explained why we prefer the permissive way in which clause 14 is expressed. I hope that, on reflection, the Opposition will not press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 116.

Division No. 148] [9.52 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boateng, Paul
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Y's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Maclarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Speaker: The Prime Minister—business motion.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Not moved, Sir.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Every morning, you have to go through the Order Paper. You know that today's Order Paper contains a business motion to enable the debate on the Planning and Compensation Bill to continue after 10 o'clock. The Government are now in such a mess that they cannot even move their own business motion. They have reached the end of their tether.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There cannot be any point of order. I called the 10 o'clock business motion, but it was not moved.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The answer to your question, "Debate to be resumed what day?" was, "Tomorrow." We have to presume that that is a fiction, because there is business set down for tomorrow until 2.30 pm. Given that the Government accept that there will be lots of time in which this Bill can be debated, that they clearly recognise that an early election is off the agenda, and that we all here for several months to come, including you, Sir, perhaps they will have a chance to re-think some of the unsound policies in this Bill and get them right second time round.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I had better deal with points of order one at a time. "Tomorrow" is secret language; it might mean any day.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As this is a Government who care about the family, is it in order for us to go home now, at 10 o'clock?

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As we were expecting to complete the Bill tonight and as many of us stayed here to debate items that we have not reached, has the Leader of the House given you any sign that he wishes to make a statement about the business of the House? There was a statement earlier today announcing next week's business. May we expect him to make a request to you to make a statement, or can we assume that tomorrow is some time away?

Mr. Cryer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I make it clear that the Opposition are keen to go ahead with the Bill? Indeed, when you were not in the Chair, Conservative Members complained at the way in which the Government were trying to curtail debating time. I imagine that Conservative Members who are interested in this important legislation will feel even more aggrieved that the Government are not pressing ahead. We invite them to do so. We are willing to scrutinise the Bill, but they have thrown the towel in, and it is a disgrace.

Mr. Wilshire: Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Is it parliamentary language to describe the 24 Labour Members who voted against the clause just now as "many"? I thought that I heard the hon. Member for Burnley say that many Opposition Members wished to carry on the debate. I do not think that 24 is many.

Mr. Soley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The real point behind all this and behind the secret language that you are referring to is the secret language of new clause 16 and of new clause 22, which deals with hedgerows. The Government face defeat on both clauses because sufficient Conservative members were not going to support them. I suggest, through you, Mr. Speaker, that there is an opportunity for the Government to complete the Bill as they intended to do tonight. Indeed, consultations with members of our Front Bench confirmed that the Government wanted to do so. If they concede on clause 22, as I suggested to them in a bid at the beginning, we would be willing to continue on that basis; the arrangements that they make on clause 16 are a matter for them. Otherwise, the only interpretation is that the Government cannot deliver their members on a vote of this sort.

Sir George Young: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have been debating a large and complex 76-clause Bill. This evening many hon. Members on both sides of the House have taken a keen interest in the passage of the Bill. We have a long way to go, and, in the Government's view, it makes sense to devote further time on another day to the completion of this important measure. No doubt the usual channels will be in discussion to find a suitable time.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we need any more points of order. I often hear Members complaining that they are kept up late at night. Legislation is not——

Mr. Haynes: This is a correction.

Mr. Speaker: Legislation is not well dealt with at a late hour. The Government have not moved their motion; there is nothing more to be said. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) can get his car and go back to his constituency.

Mr. Haynes: It is not fair. I am trying to listen to you, Mr. Speaker, but there is a load of rabble rousers on the Conservative Benches. I never heard a word that you said. I rise to correct something that was said by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). He referred to 24 Labour Members voting. There were two Opposition Whips, and I was one of them. That is 26, not 24. You, Mr. Speaker, should correct him.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is right. If he did not hear me, I said that he should now get his car and go home.

Nuclear Waste (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.10 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Many hon. Members are leaving to return to their families, but other hon. Members wish to raise important issues this evening. I am glad to see members of all parties present to listen to the debate. It is a brief debate, but I warn the Minister that my hon. Friends and I will return to this subject time and again because the Scottish National party regards it as critical.

I shall seek information from the Minister on various points that concern me, my constituents and many others throughout Scotland. If he cannot respond as I raise them, I am willing to wait for a detailed written response, but I expect unequivocal answers to my points. I raise them with sincerity and humility, because this is one of the major issues facing not only Scotland but the rest of the United Kingdom and the world. It deserves serious attention.

I start from the point of view that my party has always argued that the disposal of nuclear waste should be addressed internationally. We recognise our responsibility for the disposal of nuclear waste produced in Britain. We believe that nuclear waste should be stored on site and above ground, where it can be carefully monitored.

It appears that Scotland is being singled out to become the nuclear dustbin of the world; we are being expected to launder everyone's nuclear waste. The only advantage that anyone can see is that money will go to the Exchequer in London, but we in Scotland will lose our vital industries.

The Government have said clearly that they place the environment at the top of their political agenda. In her speech to the 1988 Conservative party conference, the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), said:

> "No generation has a freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy, with a full repairing lease. This Government intends to meet the terms of that lease in full."

Perhaps for the only time, I agree with the right hon. Lady.

Nuclear waste disposal is seen in Scotland as the key environmental issue of the day. The case against siting a repository for nuclear waste at Dounreay and Caithness is unassailable, whatever criteria any of us care to apply, be they moral, democratic, environmental or economic.

Let me emphasise the democratic decision. Without doubt, the overwhelming majority of public opinion in Scotland is against the use of Dounreay as the site for a deep waste disposal repository. The vast majority of Scotland's elected representatives—in this House, in the European Parliament and in all other representative bodies—have clearly expressed their opposition.

I refer in particular to what happens in the Highland region, where Highland regional council itself is spearheading the opposition to the use of Dounreay. In Caithness, the area most directly affected, a referendum was held in which the people voted 3:1 against Nirex using Dounreay as a waste dump. Almost 12,000 people voted. That is a 58 per cent. turnout, which, by most standards, is quite high. In a local government by-election, a turnout of half the electorate is considered quite good. In Caithness, 58 per cent. responded, and 73 per cent. of them said no. Only 3,000—25 per cent.—of them were in favour. By any democratic yardstick, that is a clear indication of the opinion of the people of that area.

The Minister should address himself to the democratic argument. I can think of no one better whose remarks to quote in this context than the present Secretary of State for Scotland. In April 1979, the right hon. Gentleman was the prospective parliamentary candidate for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, where consideration was being given to the possibility of using Mullwarchar as a disposal site. On 19 April 1979, the right hon. Gentleman wrote to the Conservation Society saying that he found it difficult to understand what the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority was up to:

> "As they said they would take account of public opinion, which is unanimously hostile, I find it extremely disappointing that UKAEA should have decided to take the matter further, with an appeal to the Secretary of State, after the clear rejection of their earlier application."

As that was the view of the Secretary of State on a proposal affecting his own area, let me make a direct plea to him to exercise the same attitude towards the people of Caithness, the people of Highland region and the people of Scotland who have spoken out against the proposal. The Government claim to listen to democratic voices and respect democratic aspirations. If that is so, they should surely respond and display an attitude much more constructive than that which they have recently shown.

I do not wish to dwell for too long on the economic and social impact of siting a deep waste repository in Caithness because I have already spoken out about it in previous debates. I should say to the Minister, however, that when I speak on these issues I am not merely expressing the passion that I feel about them; I am recognising my responsibility to my constituents and to the many people who write to me on the matter.

The Minister should talk to a fisherman from my constituency, a farmer in Caithness or a whisky distiller somewhere in the highlands—perhaps from Speyside, in my own area. He should talk to anyone involved in the tourist industry. All of them know full well the implications of the Government's proposals. They know what the knock-on effect will be. The perception of a clean environment on which our industries depend could be destroyed if the Government continue with their intention, through Nirex, to use Caithness as a site for nuclear waste disposal. All of them know that 100 long-term jobs may be made available through the siting of the repository, but that those 100 jobs will mean nothing if we then lost thousands of jobs because the perception of our clean environment has gone and we cannot sell our produce in the domestic or international markets. Those views have been expressed to me by business men who know full well what the implications are. It is not a question of scaremongering. It is a genuine fear. It is a genuine recognition of the situation.

Again, the Secretary of State, on this very point, said in April 1979:

> "I believe it is quite unacceptable even to contemplate the irretrievable storage of nuclear waste in the manner proposed by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, as no amount of preliminary research can guarantee its safety for the very long period of its continuing radioactivity. For that reason the question of exploratory test bores is irrelevant and they should not be proceeded with."

He went on:

> "As regards the suggestion that the Secretary of State, whoever he may be after the election, might grant approval to

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

the test bores without holding a public inquiry, I cannot of course speak for other parties, but having investigated the matter within my own"—

that is the Conservative party—

"I am quite satisfied that under a Conservative Secretary of State such action would be entirely out of the question."

We see a very clear contrast between what was said by the right hon. Gentleman in 1979 and what is now being said in 1991 because, Highland regional council having made it clear that it did not want planning permission for this to go ahead, the Secretary of State has overruled its wishes and is imposing a very different viewpoint from his previous one on the people of the highlands of Scotland. That is an element of hypocrisy which I am not prepared to accept as a Member of the House and a representative of the communities in the north of Scotland.

When he last spoke about this issue in the House in a debate on the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, the Minister, who is in his place, said:

"Nirex has made it clear that, other factors being equal, Sellafield—not Dounreay—will be the preferred site because of transport considerations."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 1254.]

Within the House that evening there was a general consensus among all the parties, including supporters of the nuclear industry, who asked why in that case we were continuing to have this planning blight held over our heads in the north of Scotland. It became quite clear that the Minister believed that Dounreay would not be the site for the disposal of nuclear waste. Why then was it, since many of us went away feeling heartened by the situation, that a matter of days later the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that he would allow 200 to 250 test boreholes to be drilled in the Dounreay area, with the possibility of 6,000 test boreholes eventually being undertaken?

I have done a fair amount of research on what exactly is meant by these boreholes, or shotholes, as Nirex and the Minister seem to prefer to call them. What worries me in particular is how we in the area express our concern. The Minister says that there will need to be a further planning inquiry. What kind of planning inquiry will it be? Will it be a situation in which Nirex has an open cheque book, with blank cheques, underwritten by the Secretaries of State for Energy, for Transport and for Scotland—by the Government themselves—while those of us who oppose this project will be left to beg, to raise money in charitable ways, in order to fund our advocates and solicitors? If there is to be any further planning inquiry, it must be on a level playing field, so that voices have equal force.

At what stage will the planning inquiry be implemented? Will it be after the 250, of after the 6,000, or will it be when we get to the possibility of 1,000 metre deep holes being drilled into Caithness? I understand—and this comes from research undertaken by the House of Commons Library—that eventually there will need to be some 20 to 30 boreholes about 1,000 m deep. They will pass through unconsolidated surface sediments, Devonian age sandstones and then into Moine basement rock. The Devonian and Moine are both highly consolidated, so drilling through them is very slow. Coring is slow and expensive. The time taken to drill and test each borehole will probably be about six months and each will cost between £5 million and £10 million.

When examining that type of situation, we must know in our communities what facility we have to argue our case as matters proceed. There is a deep-seated suspicion and anxiety about why, if Dounreay is not the preferred option of Nirex but Sellafield is for intermediate and low level waste, we are going ahead with the testbore drillings.

I want a categorical assurance from the Minister—I plead with him not to mince words—that there will never be the possibility of Dounreay being used for high-level waste disposal. Many people suspect that it will be, and I appreciate their fears because much secrecy has surrounded what has been going on. We need that type of assurance for our people, for our industries and for the sake of future generations.

I could speak for 15 hours on this subject, but I see that the Minister is anxious to respond to my remarks. I do not have time to raise issues such as transportation and whether article 37 of the Euratom treaty is being observed or disregarded by the Government. I have spoken with sincerity and concern for the people of my area. I hope that tonight we shall have a positive response from the Government. We deserve such a response.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on being successful in raising this issue on the Adjournment, and I shall answer the questions that she asked. The first related to the Secretary of State. She referred to the views expressed by my right hon. Friend at the inquiry into a proposal for geological investigations in an area adjoining his constituency and suggested that his attitude towards the Dounreay application was at variance with the stance that he adopted at that time.

It is over 11 years since that inquiry took place. Scientific understanding of the technology of nuclear waste disposal has moved on a great deal in the intervening decade. At that time, the question was whether low and intermediate-level nuclear waste could be safely disposed of on land. Since then, the Government have accepted the advice of their professional advisors that it is indeed safe to do so.

The hon. Lady called for an international approach. I am glad to tell her that other countries have taken the same view including the Swedes who, as the House knows, take matters of environmental safety extremely seriously. Finland, Switzerland, Germany and America also take that view. As the Secretary of State for the Environment stated on 21 March 1989:

"It is now Government policy that a deep repository should be established and that two sites which appear suitable should be investigated in detail."

But Ministers have also made it quite clear, as I have said, that any proposal to construct such a repository will be the subject of full debate at a public local inquiry. This will provide every opportunity for a full discussion of the very understandable concerns about the implications of nuclear waste disposal that my right hon. Friend articulated on behalf of his constituents some 11 years ago.

While I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this Adjournment debate, I am disappointed that this morning, at a press conference, she should have engaged in an element of scaremongering. I appreciate that her opposition to a deep disposal facility for low and

intermediate-level waste at Dounreay has been long-standing, but her claim that the Government have plans for a high-level waste repository there is totally without foundation.

I must make it clear that the United Kingdom has no disposal policy as yet for high-level waste. As I shall explain, it is to be stored in vitrified form for at least 50 years before disposal is required. UK Nirex has been charged to locate, develop and design a deep disposal facility for low and intermediate-level waste only. It has no such role in relation to high-level waste.

Nor are the flaws in the hon. Lady's analysis confined to that suggestion. I am glad to have the opportunity to reply to her and to explain the intentions of the Scottish Office and its determination to dispose of radioactive waste in a way which guarantees maximum safety. The recommendation of UK Nirex, to which the Government agreed, was that a comparative study of the two sites should be made until the point was reached when efforts could be concentrated on one preferred site.

It is important to establish at the outset that the disposal of radioactive material is a matter of direct relevance to Scotland, which is certainly not being singled out. Some 50 per cent. of the electricity generated in Scotland comes from nuclear power stations. It is therefore a vital element in our generating capacity and the Government must pursue a responsible policy for managing the spent fuel from the nuclear power stations and radioactive wastes from other sources in Scotland. Further wastes will arise from the decommissioning of power stations and the reprocessing plants at Dounreay as they complete their operational life. Decommissioning work has already started at Hunterston A power station. It will also be needed later this decade when the fast breeder prototype reactor at Dounreay stops production. Therefore, the Scottish Office has a moral duty to find the best and safest solution.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have many questions to answer and I should like to complete them, but I will follow up later any points on which the hon. Lady requires further information.

Three categories of radioactive waste require Government action in terms of their safe disposal. Steps to dispose of high-level waste are best taken after 50 years, when the heat and radioactivity has significantly decayed. That will simplify disposal. Accordingly, the Government's policy on such waste is that it should be stored in a vitrified form for at least 50 years. A vitrification plant was opened at Sellafield earlier this year and will secure the crucial first step in that process. The arrangements for the final disposal of the waste remain to be decided, but we have time on our side because of the requirement that storage should last for at least 50 years.

Heat generation from intermediate and low-level waste is no technical obstacle to emplacement, and UK Nirex has advised the Government that the most sensible course of action for those categories of waste is to be co-disposed in a deep disposal facility. It is proposed to adopt a multi-barrier containment approach, designed to keep the radioactive substances away from people, animals and plants by using a series of different and separate physical and chemical barriers until the process of radioactive decay makes them barely distinguishable from naturally occurring materials.

At present, there are shallow disposal sites for low-level waste at Drigg, near Sellafield, and at Dounreay. There is capacity at Drigg into the next century. However, there are no existing disposal facilities for intermediate-level waste, which must all be stored pending a suitable disposal arrangement. UK Nirex Ltd. has the task of developing a disposal facility for low-level and intermediate waste and, in the pursuit of that task, there have been activities and planning applications in respect of land at Dounreay to which the hon. Lady takes exception.

Many parts of the United Kingdom have potentially suitable geology for such a repository. The principal requirement is that there should be suitable rock at the right depth with low and predictable water flow. The hon. Lady called for that problem to be redressed internationally, and there is a worldwide consensus that underground repositories are the most promising disposal option. Indeed, one is already in operation in Sweden, one is being constructed in Finland, and plans are well advanced in Switzerland, Germany and the United States. Scientists and geologists are satisfied that we now have the technological capability for a fully verified and safe repository.

UK Nirex has chosen to concentrate its investigations at two sites where the nuclear industry is already established and where the local population has come to understand that safety—both for the work force and for the surrounding environment—is an extremely important consideration on the part of the nuclear industry. The two sites are Sellafield, where the country's major nuclear reprocessing plant is situated, and Dounreay, where reprocessing work, albeit on a much smaller scale, has been undertaken for many years and where there is a prototype fast breeder reactor.

UK Nirex has systematically set about the necessary task of establishing whether the geological conditions were suitable at each site. To that end, it has completed two deep boreholes at Sellafield and a third and fourth are being drilled at present. Planning permission has been given for a further two deep boreholes, so that a complete and satisfactory geological analysis may be secured. At Dounreay, one deep borehole has been completed and drilling on another is to start shortly. Nirex only has planning permission for those two boreholes. Because the geology is more straightforward at Dounreay, it is not considered necessary to seek permission for more deep boreholes during the present preliminary investigations.

The deep boreholes are extremely informative about the geology at Dounreay, but a complete geological analysis requires UK Nirex to understand the geology of the whole area and this requires a variety of geophysical surveys to be undertaken in the area surrounding the main Dounreay complex. A seismic survey using lorry-mounted vibration sources has been completed but this may need to be supplemented by a further survey in which the vibration sources will be small explosive charges in shallow shotholes—a standard and widely used survey technique, for example in the oil industry. UK Nirex sought permission for a maximum of 6,000 shallow shotholes. However, it is assessing the non-intrusive seismic work already undertaken and if further work is deemed necessary, it is intended in the first instance to do no more

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

than 200 to 240 of those shallow shotholes, following up with further shotholes in those areas where the geology remains unclear.

It is intended that work at both Dounreay and Sellafield will be sufficiently advanced by the latter part of this year to enable UK Nirex to decide which of the two sites is preferred so that they may concentrate further efforts on that site alone. As I stated on the Floor of the House on 25 April—and I chose my words with care—UK Nirex has made it clear that, other factors being equal, Sellafield and not Dounreay will be the preferred site because of transport considerations.

Highland regional council has made it clear that it is opposed in principle to any repository being established within its boundaries. It has sought to resist that possibility by a variety of means, including the exercise of its planning powers. It included in its structure plan review policies opposing the establishment of a repository within the region and any geological research needed to investigate the suitability of sites for such a purpose. It also refused planning application for two deep boreholes and for the shallow shotholes required for the seismic survey.

The Secretary of State, in approving the structure plan, deleted the policies on nuclear waste disposal. That was because there is a national interest in the safe disposal of such waste. It would be entirely inappropriate if a local authority, in discharging its planning responsibilities, could on the basis of local consideration frustrate the pursuit of such a national objective. It was my right hon. Friend's duty, as the guardian of the national interest, to look at this matter objectively in the best interests of Scotland as a whole.

Mrs. Ewing *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is a fundamental principle of the planning system that all applications and appeals must be decided solely on the planning merits of the development or operation proposed. But in both cases that have come to the Secretary of State on appeal, the council turned down the applications on grounds which in essence have nothing to do with the proposals themselves. It and other opponents based their objections not on the effects of the drilling and seismic surveys, but on the possible consequences of a subsequent application for planning permission for a repository, which might or might not be proposed. As I have already said, setting aside the geological considerations, Sellafield has significant cost advantages.

The Secretary of State's decision on both appeals were in the nature quasi-judicial decisions and based on the planning merits of the proposals themselves. His decisions showed that he had considered those proposals most thoroughly and taken great care to satisfy himself that they were acceptable. In particular, he took steps to mitigate any adverse environmental consequences that might arise. Thus, in granting permission for the seismic survey, he imposed conditions designed to ensure that the survey did not give rise to unacceptable levels of noise, dust emission, vibration and general disturbance and that loss of amenity was kept within tolerable limits. My right hon. Friend's reasoning is set out in full in the decision letter, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

I cannot repeat too often what has already been made clear by several members of the Government, including the Prime Minister—that this decision in no way pre-empts a decision on any future application to build a repository. As I said on Report stage of the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, planning permission would be required before a repository could be constructed at either Sellafield or Dounreay. The Government have given a clear commitment that the relevant application would be called in for decision by the appropriate Secretary of State and a full public local inquiry would be held.

It is at that inquiry that the legitimate interests of the Highland regional council about any detrimental effects on the environment, economy and infrastructure, and the hon. Lady's points about whisky and fishing, would be fully taken into account if a planning application were submitted. I very much regret that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) implied that the Government would prejudge any such application. That is not the case, and it was a grossly irresponsible allegation that he made in the *Press and Journal* on 10 May.

Due to the massive construction costs—about £2·5 billion—the Government are committed to a single facility for the United Kingdom. One possible result of the hon. Member's desire for an independent Scotland could be separate repositories north and south of the border. Were that to happen, such duplication could entail literally billions of pounds of needless expenditure, because the infrastructure and engineering costs would be exceptionally high, regardless of the eventual capacity of any repository.

The Government give the highest possible priority to safety. I hope that the hon. Lady will understand why the Government cannot be swayed in their central determination to pursue in-depth investigations thoroughly, conscientiously and, above all, with the national interest constantly in mind. That is what UK Nirex has been doing at Dounreay—no more, and no less.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 17 May 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Points of Order

9.35 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday treated the unemployed with contempt by uttering a slur against them and telling them that it was necessary for them to be thrown on the scrap heap, creating a pile of human misery, in order to carry out the Government's policies. Has the right hon. Gentleman approached you with a view to making an apology in the House to the unemployed? Because he attacked them in so severe a fashion yesterday, he should before this day is out do his duty and come here to apologise to the unemployed.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such intimation. Indeed, I do not recollect that speech. Was it made here?

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Further to a point of order that was made yesterday, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that last night, after 10 o'clock, the Government moved that the Planning and Compensation Bill *[Lords]* debate be adjourned, and when you asked what day it would be resumed, the reply was, "tomorrow".

That measure appears not to feature on today's Order Paper. I wonder, first, whether that is proper—that having said that it would be on today, it is not down for debate today—and, secondly, whether we can take the inference from that that, like the general election, it has been postponed indefinitely.

Mr. Speaker: I explained last night—the hon. Member has been here long enough to appreciate this—that "tomorrow" was a kind of code for any day. In any event, the Bill appears as item 43 on page 3213 of the Order Paper today, where it says "to be considered."

Constitutional Reform

9.37 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I wish to call attention to the case for constitutional reform and I beg to move,

That this House, noting the results of the recent MORI opinion poll on the State of the Nation, calls on Her Majesty's Government to introduce measures designed to effect an extensive modernisation of the United Kingdom's democratic institutions and constitutional provisions.

One of the funniest things to happen to me in the House since I was elected in 1983 occurred in the last Parliament. Unusually, I was sitting with some friends and visitors from my constituency in the public gallery. The House was crowded, as it had been throughout the debate. We were sitting behind an eight-year-old who was obviously, by his accent, from the west coast of Scotland.

I nipped down into the Division Lobby and afterwards returned to where I had been sitting. The little boy was clearly watching the scene of apparent chaos with dismay, with hon. Members elbowing their way into the Lobby from a crowded House. The division bells were ringing throughout the precincts of the Palace of Westminster and, according to tradition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who was in the Chair, shouted, "Lock the doors." I heard the wee fellow turn to his mother and utter the immortal words, "Mam, one of them has escaped." I often think that people have a strange perception of what goes on in this place. Perhaps children have a way of cutting through the cant and nonsense that some of us cannot see.

Indeed, people have strange perceptions of the whole process of government. They may not have a perfect grasp of all the subtleties of our unwritten constitution and they may not fully understand the relationship between the judiciary, the Executive and the legislature; they may also have many false expectations of what can be politically achieved and what is realistically possible. For example, people regularly tell me in the same breath that they are in favour of strong government and united parties, and that they believe that Members of Parliament should exercise their individual consciences in the Division Lobbies. Those, surely, are mutually exclusive objectives.

There is one issue, however, on which people are sufficiently wise and sufficiently tutored to decide: the question whether our system of government serves their needs. The current public feeling is that government is not working. We must, of course, ensure that proper respect is paid to our democratic institutions, which must be assiduously fostered and defended. None the less, a great deal of nonsensical cant and mystique surrounds much of our constitutional baggage and I feel that that should now be discarded.

Is it not more than a little strange that we have no permanent, open and accessible machinery to allow constant review of our constitutional arrangements? Can any hon. Member recall when we last engaged in a debate on constitutional reform, apart from Consolidated Fund debates in the middle of the night? The most recent such debate, as far as I know, took place in 1968, when the former Liberal leader Mr. Jeremy Thorpe—then Member of Parliament for Devon, North—introduced a debate on the Kilbrandon report when the House was dealing with the Gracious Speech.

That is a long time for which to leave such a subject undiscussed. Is it not more than ever necessary for effective

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checks and balances to be applied and constantly reviewed at a time when our country is experiencing exponential rates of change in social and economic matters? Statutory provision now regulates every aspect of our private lives from the cradle to the grave; information technology threatens to make slaves of us all.

Our ramshackle, amateurish, muddle-through mentality is now holding the United Kingdom back. Our system of government is shot through with administrative myths and political fictions, and is no longer adequate to carry out its task. The lack of a clearly defined, modern framework for our constitution is now one of the most urgent problems that face the country. I feel that hon. Members, representing as they do so many disparate constituencies, have a duty to respond clearly to the need for change.

I freely acknowledge that the body politic has been wrestling with the task of modernising our system of government for the past three decades. Much ingenuity and considerable energy have been expended, but, according to any test, the extent to which lasting results have been produced does not measure up to the effort deployed. Little real progress has been made, as a brief review of recent reforms will show. It is, in fact, a disappointing and depressing saga.

It could be argued that the Macmillan Government were the first to recognise the need for change. That Government looked specifically at economic and industrial policy making, and set up the National Economic Development Council as a national forum for policy discussion. That was potentially a very important reform; the Germans have used a similar mechanism with great success in the recent past. Over the years, the fortunes of the NEDC may have waxed and waned, but it is still with us, endeavouring to do good by stealth when it can—which, admittedly, is not often nowadays.

Macmillan also introduced the short-lived National Incomes Commission—together with new techniques for controlling public expenditure, following the recommendations of the Plowden report in 1962. The pace of reformist change gathered momentum as the Governments of Lord Wilson—as he now is—and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) vied with each other in a bid to be seen as the real architects of the modernisation of Britain's political institutions. That time, when I first became politically aware—the period of the white heat of technology and the Heath Government's dash for growth—was a heady one for anyone who was interested in politics; but its reforming achievements did not amount to a row of administrative beans.

In the mid-1960s, the Labour Government invented the Department of Economic Affairs, introduced its still-born "national plan", instituted the Government Economic Service, empanelled regional planning boards and set up the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, the Prices and Incomes Board and the Commission of Industrial Relations. They also introduced a system of ministerial cabinets, in which political advisers were allowed to help Ministers at Cabinet level and within the civil service system. In the wake of the Fulton report, the Wilson Government also modified the running of the civil service substantially.

All those changes were focused on economic and industrial policy making. Another common feature was the introduction of quangos: the great and the good were appointed to do the bidding of the political Administration.

In their turn, the Heath Government reorganised local government, established the Central Policy Review Staff —a potentially important administrative and political reform which did not come to much—spawned both a Prices Commission and a pay board and invented the Manpower Services Commission and an industrial development executive. Amid all that economic and industrial change, the Kilbrandon commission on the constitution reported in 1973, but no one seemed to take much notice of its recommendations.

There was, however, no slackening of reformist zeal on the industrial and economic front when Mr. Wilson returned to office in 1974. He rapidly formed the National Enterprise Board, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the Health and Safety Commission, the National Consumer Council and other similar bodies. A tinge of consumerism was beginning to appear on the agenda, although a good many quangos—publicly appointed bodies—were still being set up to carry out the changes that were then being recommended.

I have given those examples to try to give the flavour, and show the nature and range, of the modernising endeavours—such as they were—that were implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. The spirit, or motivating force, that prompted those endeavours may well have been similar to that which prompted the era of mid-century reform experienced by the Victorians. The difference lies in the fact that they lack the impact and substance of the 19th century's far-reaching constitutional reforms. To be fair, that lack was all too apparent to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when she entered No. 10 Downing street. She actually diagnosed the problem: the institutional changes put in train by her predecessors had largely failed in their attempt to update the system of government to serve the needs of our people.

Apparently, our former Prime Minister needed advice from no one; quangos were out and strong men were in as the main agents of change. Tripartism—the whole system of across-the-board, collective consultation and discussion —fell from grace, to be replaced by accountants, management consultants and retailers: the likes of Lord Rayner and Sir Roy Griffiths. The modernising gurus of the Thatcher era had arrived with a vengeance. Market forces would achieve all the change that was necessary and devil take the hindmost.

Unfortunately, as is now all too apparent, while these business people, acting in good faith, as I am sure they were, had some impact on public policy, as often as not it was for the worst. The results of their ministrations can be seen all too clearly in the deterioration and demoralisation that are now widespread in the public sector. The notion of public service as an honourable and fulfilling activity with a degree of job satisfaction and of public status was gradually being replaced by the business ethic. Education, local government, health, transport systems, the prisons, the police and the law court services have all been blighted by their attentions.

The former Prime Minister correctly saw the failures of previous Governments, but she did not learn the proper lessons or draw the right conclusions. Instead, her attempts to change things made the problems worse. They

culminated in the great irony that, for all the rhetoric about freedom, her Government took more power to themselves, arguably, than at any other time in our history since the Tudors, with the difference that the Tudors were nation building while the former Prime Minister was apparently creating a personal empire within the realms of central Government. The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) once sought to excuse his Government's overweening centralising tendencies with a stock-in-trade quip, to the effect that

"it had to nationalise in order to privatise."

The proportion of nationalisation, in the sense of greater centralised Government, to privatisation as a surrogate for greater freedom remains, in my view, excessively skewed in favour of nationalisation.

The former Prime Minister lauded Victorian values, but from my perspective she picked very selectively from them. She seized upon the tenets of economic Liberalism, but what she failed completely to do was to recognise that it required to be complemented by the principles of political Liberalism, based on participation, partnership and decentralisation. She opted for an economic system unfettered by any constitutional constraint. Thus, the political economy that is necessary for economic success totally passed her by. That has cost this country dear.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I have been following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. I share his criticism of the former Prime Minister, but her vices were not hidden from view in 1979. One wonders, therefore, why the Liberal party joined with the Conservatives to vote against the Labour Government, particularly as it was poised to introduce a private Member's Bill promoted by Clement Freud to achieve a degree of freedom of information. Why, therefore, did the Liberal party sabotage that opportunity and instead join the Conservatives, led by the woman whom the hon. Gentleman criticises?

Mr. Kirkwood: That takes us a long way back into history. I believe that that Parliament—like this Parliament—had run its course. I believe that at that stage it was right to take the issues on to the hustings where points such as that raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) could be argued openly and in public during a general election. That point should be addressed to the Prime Minister at this stage. We are at a similar point in this Parliament. The sooner we have a general election the better.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Ought not it to be placed on record that the Labour Government's willingness to intoduce a freedom of information Act, which they had previously failed conspicuously to do, depended entirely on the willingness of my then hon. Friend Mr. Clement Freud not to vote against them? A freedom of information Act was the price that they were prepared to pay out of desperation, at a very late stage in their Government, in the knowledge that it had no chance of getting through.

Mr. Kirkwood: My hon. Friend makes the point very well. One of the worst criticisms that people could make of the last Labour Government was that they set their face so rigorously against legislation that I think is now so necessary.

I was arguing that the attempted and largely abortive reforms of the last three decades have either come to absolutely nothing at all or have proved to be counterproductive. When they have not ended in tears, attempts at reform have ended in tantrums. The reason for this pathetic record and why all their energy has been dissipated is because successive Governments have been obsessively introspective. They have concentrated their efforts at reform on themselves, in the form of the Executive branch of government. Changes were often made on account of the siege mentality of the last Labour Government. The Executive started to do things, the motivation for which was to try to make things easier for themselves and to dig themselves out of holes. That is managerialism running absolutely riot. It led directly to ludicrous levels of state secrecy—to the Clive Ponting affair, Cathy Massiter, Peter Wright, GCHQ and the whole debate that surrounded the replacement of the Official Secrets Act. It also led to an increasingly political and politicised civil service. That led to all sorts of problems that we are now reading about—Westland and the unattributable briefings of Bernard Ingham. In addition, it led to the browbeating of the broadcasters—the "Death on the Rock" fiasco, the Zircon case and all these other incidents and issues that caused a great deal of concern for those of us outside government who could see what was happening.

In all three areas of our policy—the judiciary, the legislature and the Executive—we need to throw open the doors and windows of Whitehall, Westminster and the courts and let light and air into the innermost recesses of the processes of government. The proper ordering of our polity requires not just recasting the activities of the Executive but renewing the roles of both the legislature and the judicial branches of government. Modernisation, properly conceived and executed, is not just about efficiency, narrowly defined. It is about democracy in the very widest and most generous sense. Equally, and just as important, it is about contriving a framework where the one can operate effectively in relation to the other. We need to renew the context in which the requirements of the Government machine can be accommodated alongside the needs and rights of, and the ability to serve and protect, individuals and communities.

In the recent past, discussion and practice have focused almost exclusively on management techniques rather than on constitutional remedies. Against all the innovations undertaken in the name of improved efficiency, I can think —other hon. Members may be able to assist me here—of only two offsetting reforms of a truly democratic and constitutional nature: the appointment of ombudsmen to cover various aspects of public policy and the modifications and improvements to the Select Committee procedures of the House. Welcome as both those modest steps are, they are modest indeed in comparison with what is required.

One of the major drawbacks and the main reason for the very limited success of recent reforms of the Executive branch of government is that they were imposed from the top down. Objections and criticisms were rejected, on the basis that they were no more than dinner table talk at the soirees of the chattering classes. The debate, such as it was, about the inadequacies of the Government system and the shortcomings of the constitution was seen as being conducted between two elites—the Government Front Bench and readers of *The Guardian*. The mass of voters were said not to be in any way interested in any of these questions. That perception is now shown to be wholly

[Mr. Kirkwood]

wrong. The general public are fully aware of the parlous state of the machinery of government and of the inadequacies of constitutional provision. They hold strong and consistent views about how they should be redressed. The reason for the public's apparent silence on these great matters of state is simply that they had never been asked.

A recent MORI poll—a substantial piece of work that is bed-time reading for hon. Members—was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree reform trust, of which I am a director. I therefore declare an interest, although the office of trustee has no financial reward. It carried out a national survey of public opinion on the state of the nation. It was the first time that such extensive soundings had been taken on the subject, and the results showed a widespread and profound desire for democratic constitutional reform.

A clear majority would like to see improvements in the system of government. Three quarters think that a freedom of information Act is needed. Seven in 10 think that we need a Bill of Rights. Six in 10 think, not surprisingly given the Thatcher legacy, that the Government are too centralised. Three quarters favour greater use of referendums for major decisions, and more think that a petition of 1 million signatures should trigger a referendum. That is a plea for more consideration and participation if ever I heard one.

There is considerable popular support for electoral change. Eight in 10 think that national campaign spending should be limited. On a topical note, perhaps, the Prime Minister might like to be aware that more than half the electorate support fixed-term Parliaments—amen to that. Half the voters favour electoral reform, and the momentum for a change to a system of fair voting is gathering speed at such a rate that it is reluctantly engaging the attention of the Labour party.

The House may be interested to know that 59 per cent. think that Parliament works well, and 16 per cent. disagree. That might be a direct result of the positive impact of television. When the same question was asked in 1979, only 54 per cent. thought well of the workings of the House, while 39 per cent. thought that it worked badly. Significantly—this correlates closely the feeling of overcentralised government—50 per cent. think that Parliament has insufficient control over the Government. Only 23 per cent. disagreed with that proposition. Forty per cent. favour an elected second Chamber to replace the House of Lords, while only 29 per cent. disagree, and 54 per cent. believe that the Government can change citizens' right too easily, while 22 per cent. disagree. Thirty eight per cent. think that citizens' rights are less well protected in Britain than in the rest of the European Community, and 24 per cent. disagree.

There is strong and growing support among Scots for a devolved assembly. In September 1989, 44 per cent. of Scots favoured that reform, but now 51 per cent. do so. More generally in Britain, six out of 10 favoured devolved assemblies for Britain.

The motion is clearly timely. The MORI poll revealed general disquiet among the public about the state of the nation, especially about the functioning of government and the need to review our constitutional safeguards. It is equally clear that, in many instances, those who campaign for improvement—many organisations democratically campaign for change—speak for a majority constituency of our fellow citizens. With help from the Freedom of Information Campaign, I have had the privilege of steering two freedom of information Bills through Parliament. They dealt with small but important aspects of public access to files held by various bureaucracies. In this Parliament, we managed to establish the same right for access to national health service records.

The Freedom of Information Campaign is an important organisation. In their different spheres but in similar ways, the Constitutional Reform Centre, Charter 88, the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the Electoral Reform Society are resonating with the spirit of the times.

No quick fix or big bang will adequately modernise our constitutional provision. I well understand that the Government are taking action, such as inquiring into the future pattern of local government, and have recently appointed a royal commission into the working of the legal system. Both announcements are welcome but belated signs of the Government's still too dim awareness of the crisis of governance that confronts us.

Much more than these measures is called for. Constitutional reform is a multifaceted matter. It requires sensitivity to the inter-relatedness of the organs of government and the need to keep in balance one with the rest. It requires vigilance and it is, rightly, a continuing process. Of late, the House and the country have been deficient in that regard.

The modern nation state, and Britain is no exception, is threatened by pressures from above—the European Community and the international community—and from below of growing regional and local awareness. Those pressures must be accommodated and reconciled. We must seek to create a coherent and codified new constitutional settlement that will decentralise power and yet be consonant with, and contribute to, the development and democratisation of the institutions of the European Community.

We must apply nationally the sustained energy and effort that has been shown by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the past few weeks. In an apparently intractable political situation, he has been trying to achieve positive, lasting change. Such commitment is needed to solve the problems.

Sooner or later, the Government, of whatever colour, and the House, whatever its composition, will have to apply themselves to a systematic review of the constitutional framework of the United Kingdom. Liberal Democrats will continue to press for such a review and robustly to argue our party political agenda to establish the need for change. I hope that the debate will allow the House to express a view. I have deliberately avoided a partisan, party-political approach. I hope that we shall be able to test opinion in the House. I remind hon. Members of the adage coined by George Bernard Shaw on the need to get one's jacket off and fight for what one believes in. He said that people have

"to be careful to get what they like, or they might have to like what they get."

10.7 am

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): The House owes a debt to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for raising the major issues of constitutional change. I quote George Bernard Shaw, who

said that he could suggest improvements when he got to heaven. Some hon. Members would undoubtedly concur with that view.

I speak as a reactionary. I make no apologies for being a reactionary; if there had been a few more reactionaries among the Gadarene swine, they would have lived a little longer. The sweep of progress took them over the hills and to their own fatal destruction.

In 1641, Lord Falkland, speaking on an episcopal matter, said:

"When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change."

I repeat that for the benefit of those listening:

"When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change."

In other words, if something is working, the case has to be made for change—and considered very carefully. Often, the best is the enemy of the good. In trying to make a good system perfect, one tends to pull it to bits and nobody wants the end product.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, in his scholarly and informed speech, mentioned changes in the past 25 years. Most of the changes have been disasters and the relics of those disasters are littered round the place. An example is comprehensive education, which was introduced with the best of intentions by the Labour party. It presumed that it would lead to a more egalitarian and learned society, but I do not believe that it has. It has handicapped working-class children more than any legislation this century and has lowered education standards.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): In Scotland, comprehensive education has been broadly accepted by the community and operates to the satisfaction of most people. By any measure, we far outscore the English education system. If comprehensive education is so fundamentally flawed, why is Scotland doing so well educationally?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) because he makes my case. Comprehensive education was a natural growth in Scotland. In this country it was implanted by a Government against the wishes of the majority of people and it does not work. The hon. Gentleman must regularly come along when I make my speeches and we can perform a twin turn.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) relate his views to the constitution that brought about the system of education that he dislikes and which, according to him, allowed a system to be foisted upon a country that did not want it? Does not that suggest that there is something wrong with the constitution?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I rather like that—the hon. Member has made a good point. I cannot win them all so I shall merely nod cheerfully to him on that issue. What he said bears out what I said first. As long as the system works overall, that is all that we can ask for—we cannot have a system that works all the time.

Local government was mentioned and I believe that my party's local government reorganisations in 1964 and 1972 were disasters. Similarly, conglomerates were built up in business and it was the fashion for them to buy up everything. Another fashion that swept the country, which was not a constitutional issue although it came from the House and from a desire for change, was that for tower blocks, which have probably harmed family life more than anything else in the past 25 or 30 years. They came about because people wanted change and said that the walkways in the sky were a good thing.

There is now much talk about regional assemblies—a Scottish assembly, a Welsh elected chamber and others—which appear to be the fashion of the time of the month. I believe that, overall, our system of one-Member constituencies with a Member who is responsible to the electorate and who is a member of a party, works well. Usually, it means that elections result in firm government and at by-elections along the way—I believe that there was one yesterday—there is a chance to test public opinion. By-elections tell the party in power that it should consider what it is doing if it wishes to remain on the Government Benches after the next general election.

Let us consider minority Governments. There were minority Governments in 1923, in 1929-31 and again in 1974-79, and each was a disaster. There was not a Government with a working majority about which everyone could grumble or which everyone could praise, but a mishmash. When we vote in a general election under a one-Member constituency system, we at least know for whom we are voting—we are voting for a member with a name; he is a member of a party and the party has a leader. We cannot give everyone a view; that would be an idyllic situation. I have no idea what the system is in heaven and I sometimes wonder what the economic situation is in heaven, let alone the constitutional system. If the system does not give a clear majority, one cannot know who will be the Prime Minister, or which parties will come together, and decisions are taken not by those who cast their votes in the ballot box but by those in what used in America to be called "smoke-filled rooms" and what are now "non smoke-filled rooms" or "no-thought rooms".

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*—

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I shall give way as I see that there is great agitation on the Opposition Benches, probably in agreement with me.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman argues that we need a Government with a clear mandate. The fallacy of his argument is that we consistently have minority Governments who represent minority views, but who impose policies that the majority of people do not like—the poll tax is a good recent example—and which then have to be changed. There is a strong argument for strong government, but there is a much stronger argument for government with majority support. With respect, it is all very well for the right hon. Gentleman to defend the present system on the basis that it works well, but it does so only from the point of view of minorities that get power, but not from that of the people who are not given power under the present system.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: If 100 people get together, there will be 100 opinions. It is difficult to define the majority view, but there is more likelihood of attaining a majority view with a clear two-party system under which each party must appeal to the mass of the electorate than under a system where each party appeals to minority social groups. There is no ideal system—I am not saying that we have the best

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

system that the world has ever known, but I am saying that it works. If we mess around with it, we shall worsen it. I know that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and his party believe that they can change the world overnight in an astonishing way so that we should all be wearing rose-coloured spectacles.

I began with a quotation and I shall finish with a quotation to round off my speech. I said that our system works tolerably well, so we should realise how fortunate we are to have this Chamber and all our arrangements when we look at history and other systems around the world. We have not always had one-Member constituencies—we had two-Member constituencies until fairly recently. There are arguments for two-Member constituencies, especially those with two votes for all, but the one-Member constituency has two advantages. First, it ensures that the Member stays in touch with the people who have elected him and, secondly, it acts as a defence against an over-powerful party system especially if he keeps his links with those people. Proportional representation could be disastrous, where the party is in charge, and the Member moves up and down a list and bows to the people in power and does not argue. If the Member stays in touch with his constituency, he knows what is going on and there is a chance that the majority will be satisfied, and there is a defence against an overwhelming party system.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North West): The only difficulty that I have with the point that the right hon. Member for Brent North (Sir R. Boyson) is making is that it is not true. The individual Member of Parliament is not a bastion against an overweening party system. If the right hon. Gentleman, with all his distinction, flamboyance, knowledge, and—let us say, for the sake of argument—his popularity in his constituency, were to change party and stand as Sir Rhodes Boyson, Independent, he would lose, and he knows it.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: The hon. Member makes a tempting offer, but I must resist it and not make another constitutional change along the way. Marginal seats are held or lost according to the service of the individual Member. It is important that people know who their Member of Parliament is—he should be identifiable. Last night I was in my constituency to deal with a road-widening scheme and I shall be there tonight and on Saturday and Sunday. The same is true for most hon. Members. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, North West (Mr. Banks), for whom I have the greatest respect, for bringing another matter to my attention although he may later wonder how he did so, but he can think about that for the rest of the day.

This week there was an illustration in Brent of what happens when we move too far from a two-party system. Last year, the election in Brent was hung and we could not elect any chairmen of committees. The council was hung in more ways than one—by its behaviour and by the way it was regarded by the electorate. There were no chairman of committees—it depended on who got there first. Some people stayed up all night in hammocks to get inside first and as soon as the clock struck, they became chairmen for that meeting. The electorate in Brent did not like that.

I do not want to hurt the Opposition's feelings, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I shall speak more quietly and we shall whisper between ourselves. Two Members of the Labour party in Brent formed a new party called the Democratic Labour party, which is an improvement. Great thought was given to what the new party should be called. There is now a majority in Brent again and I noticed as I came through the streets this morning how different things are. People are whistling on their way to work because one party now has a majority. Who knows what may happen nationally? There may be an alliance of the Conservatives and the Democratic Labour party. The idea may sweep the country.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): After the attractive intervention by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), I was thinking that he made a point that was no doubt true for most of us. The one person of whom it would not be true would be my right hon. Friend. That is a point against my own party, so I hope that he will not leave our party and stand as an independent.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Who knows? If there are constitutional changes, what may arise? At 2.30 pm today, the whole country may change in its way of doing things.

I want to make another point in a puckish and helpful way. It is always interesting to realise that the parties in the House that are most interested in constitutional reform are those that do not have a majority. It is surprising what a change there is when there is a majority. I have great respect for the 19th century Liberals. I wrote a biography of the brother-in-law of John Bright and the closest confidant of Cobden. It is a good book which I can recommend to all hon. Members. If hon. Members want a present for the new Democratic Labour party or whoever, the opportunity is there.

If the Liberal party had replaced the Labour party as the second party in the 1983 election, would the attitude of Liberal Democrat Members be the same? It is nice to see Liberal Democrat Members in their places. Similarly, is the reason why some Labour Members support proportional representation the fact that Labour has lost three elections? What would Labour Members' attitude be if the misfortune arose that they won an election? I make that as a puckish point. I may be wrong in my deductions, but they are worth putting forward.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is not it the case that the Liberal party, when it was last in power, was very much opposed to proportional representation? Liberal Democrat Members' enthusiasm for it is far more recent.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I believe that that is the case. I did not want to push the point too far because I did not want to hurt anybody's feelings.

We live in a fallen world. I accept the garden of Eden and the fall of man both spiritually and politically. There is no ideal society in this world and people who try to make society ideal, eventually burn people to keep it that way. We are privileged when we get a system that works and we must be careful that we do not make it fall apart by trying to improve it even further. Many of the electorate—in what we used to call the public bar—are suspicious of change.

I end where I began with Lord Falkland's statement of 1641, which was repeated in the debate on the 1832 Reform Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: Whose side would the right hon. Gentleman have been on?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: The hon. Gentleman is trying to divert me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I must have your protection against being interrupted when I am trying to make a minor peroration. My compass bearing is to believe that when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. I see no need to change the political system at present.

I am also very concerned about the pressure coming from Europe for a change in our voting system. I agreed to the economic market in Europe, but I am not interested in the European Community legislating about the crisps that I can eat or about the way that we vote. If Europe continues to do that, there will be a backlash in this country against the Common Market.

10.23 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I strongly welcome the debate. It is the first time in the 40 years in which I have been here that there has been a day devoted to constitutional reform as a whole. I welcome the spirit in which the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) introduced the debate. I also welcome the theological note introduced by the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). I first remember him when he strongly advocated comprehensive schools. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was a member of the party that introduced those schools. I am reminded that this debate cuts across party lines.

Some people outside may hear the words "constitutional reform" and wonder what they mean. I heard Professor Norton say the other day that he had never met anyone who was in favour of constitutional reform. I thought therefore that I would look back at our history and mention one or two examples that will be familiar to the House.

When William the Conqueror arrived in 1066, he was engaged in constitutional reform. He was the second man to try to get us into the Common Market. Julius Caesar was the first and William the Conqueror was the second. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was the third. When William the Conqueror made his coronation oath in Westminster abbey on Christmas day 1066, he laid down how he was going to govern the country. He gave all the land to his Norman friends. When the barons went to Runnymede in 1215, they insisted on constitutional reform and the king had to yield to their pressure. A few yards from where we are sitting, in Westminster hall in 1649, Parliament tried King Charles I and later executed him a few feet along Whitehall. That was an act of constitutional reform.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I do not think that the barons in 1215 were seeking constitutional reform; they were seeking to restate what they believed were their traditional rights.

Mr. Benn: It could be argued that the present case for constitutional reform is exactly that. It could be argued that we have lost rights that we had and I shall come to that point in a moment.

When there were great debates on the Reform Bill in 1831, which led to the Reform Act of 1832, they were about constitutional reform. When the Chartists had their major march for the petition in 1839, they were demanding constitutional reform. When the suffragettes demanded votes for women, they were engaged in constitutional reform. I have now put up a little plague in the broom cupboard in memory of Emily Wilding Davison who hid there on the night of the census.

When there was a conflict between the Lords and the Commons in 1910 over the Parliament Act, which allowed the present Government to carry the War Crimes Bill against the opposition of the House of Lords, that was constitutional reform. When American forces were allowed here after the war, when we joined the European Community and when the Greater London council was abolished—they were all constitutional reforms. Let no one have any doubt that constitutional reform is central. Democracy is a process. If one discusses the process and wishes to change it, one is discussing constitutional reform.

It is widely agreed that there are now many issues on which people are interested in change. Proportional representation has been cited. The argument that a Government elected on 42 per cent. were able to enforce their will and that those in opposition to it were a majority, although a minority in the House, must have attention given to it. However, those who advocate proportional representation should consider one or two other points. In the Labour party national executive recently, I expressed my doubts about proportional representation. I said that if we had a list system, on that list my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I would be 649 and 650. One of my colleagues—I will not mention his name—asked whether we wanted that in writing.

There is also the question of a hung Parliament. As the right hon. Member for Brent, North rightly said, people would go into a room and come out with a policy and a Government for whom nobody had voted. Zero per cent. would vote for a Government emerging from a negotiation after an election. We have a view which I strongly share —and which may be rather old fashioned—that everyone should know the policy before polling day and not after it. I am doing no more than trying to raise some serious questions about the matter. The matter is not as clear cut as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire makes out. After a hung Parliament, when constituents asked "Why did you do this, Mr. Benn?" I would say that I was afraid that it was forced on me by coalition partners. MPs would then not be responsible for what they had done.

I am in favour of the matter being discussed and I do not want to exclude anything. There are people who favour proportional representation. Mr. Arthur Scargill is a strong advocate of proportional representation on the principled ground that you should not have any power until you have a majority of over 50 per cent. The Prince of Wales is a strong advocate of proportional representation and so is the Liberal Democrat party now, although it was not in favour when it had a parliamentary majority.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in campaigning for constitutional reform for many years, and properly so. Does he agree that given that, under our present system, two bodies decide the law —one not elected by anyone and the other supported by a minority not of 40 per cent. but of just over 30 per cent. —the fundamental matter on which to agree is whether those who pass the laws should be elected with the support of the majority? I should be happy to dispute with the right hon. Gentleman the secondary question whether we should have single-member or multi-member constituencies, if we can agree on the principle of a democratic majority for legislation for Britain.

Mr. Benn: I am coming to that, although personally I think that changing the voting system would not change very much, for reasons that I shall give in a minute—and not least because this House is overridden by the Commissioners in Brussels, whom we do not elect at all.

Then there is the question of people's rights. We have no rights in Britain. We are subjects, not citizens—I shall come back to that matter when I refer to the Crown—and there is an argument for a Bill of Rights. Women are grossly under-represented in this place. The 300 Group, which thinks that half the House of Commons should be made up of women, has a case. I am not personally in favour of what is called positive discrimination, but I am in favour of equality of representation, which is quite a different principle. I have no doubt that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will move to higher things and that you, along with Edith Cresson, the new Prime Minister of France, will help to redress the balance.

I have always believed in the case for home rule for Scotland. We are talking about the old Keir Hardie principle. Freedom of information, devolution, local democracy, civil liberties, relations between Parliament and the Common Market are all massive questions which must be discussed. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire had it right when he tabled his wide motion. People are interested in constitutional reform because they want this place to serve them. Very few people have an O-level or an A-level in government, but they know that, if they want something done and this place will not do it, something is wrong. I always think of this place as a steam engine. It needs some steam to move, but if there is lots of steam and the engine is defective all that happens is a great release of hot air; the engine stays where it is, which means that our mechanism is defective. I think that people are beginning to realise that.

There has always been opposition to reform. The remarks of the right hon. Member for Brent, North were in line with those of many of his predecessors. Opposing the Reform Bill in 1831, Sir Robert Peel said:

> "I am convinced it is not founded on the acknowledged principles of the constitution—because it does not give security to the prerogative of the Crown—because it does not guarantee the legitimate rights, influences and privileges of both Houses of Parliament."

Of course, Robert Peel was wrong.

Let me refer to other demands for reform—for example, the demand for votes for women. Mr. Asquith —the former Liberal Prime Minister—was a bitter opponent of votes for women. On 12 July 1910, he said:

> "In the long run, if you grant the franchise to women, you will have to grant it on the widest possible basis, and with all the consequences to which I have referred."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1910; Vol. 19, c. 250.]

There spoke the great Liberal leader. There are one or two conservatives on these Benches, too, but I am too discreet to mention them.

What about the classic Conservative statement made by Bagehot in 1873?

> "In plain English",
> wrote Bagehot,
> "what I fear is that both our political authorities will bid for the support of the working man; that both of them will promise to do as he likes if he will only tell them what it is, that, as he now holds the casting vote in our affairs, both parties will beg and pray him to give that vote to them. I can conceive of nothing more corrupting or worse for a set of poor ignorant people than that two combinations of well-taught and rich men should constantly offer to defer to their decision, and compete for the office of executing it. Vox populi will be Vox diaboli if it is worked in that manner."

The right hon. Member for Brent, North did not go so far as to say that he would like universal adult suffrage to be removed, but I had the feeling that that might be at the back of his mind. That was certainly what his party did in London.

It is impossible to discuss the constitution without discussing the Crown, because, as I said earlier, we are subjects and not citizens and we have no rights whatever. I shall come to the implications of that in a moment. The thing about a royal or monarchical system of government is that all power comes from the top, and that makes it more difficult for pressure to come from below. I always attend royal occasions, because one learns so much from the speeches made from the throne. We tell the public that we are a democracy. In this place, we are cautious; we say that we are a parliamentary democracy. When the Queen addresses us, however, she says that we are a constitutional monarchy. There is all the difference in the world between the three.

This is not a theoretical question at all, so let me give a practical example—patronage. The figures that I cite are not the latest figures, which I could have produced, because I do not want the matter to be mixed up with the past 12 years of Conservative Government. I want to present it in a rather different way. Between 1945 and 1976, successive Prime Ministers made 1,494 Ministers by the use of the royal prerogative—309 Cabinet Ministers and 1,185 non-Cabinet Ministers.

There is also the power to create peers—and remember that it takes 43 million people to elect 650 Members of Parliament. Between 1945 and 1976, a total of 568 hereditary and life peers were created on the advice of seven Prime Ministers. Taking honours generally, those same seven Prime Ministers created 118 baronetcies and 264 knighthoods and appointed 85 chairmen of nationalised industries. In a mere 26 years, 2,564 major appointments were made in the name of the crown.

We talk about Europe. As people are beginning to realise, the problem is that when Ministers go to the Council of Ministers—and I was president of the Council of Energy Ministers at one time—all the laws to which they assent are assented to under the royal prerogative of treaty-making. That is why we are an impotent body, gazing at Ministers who come back here to tell us how the prerogative has been used in our name. That is something which has not happened since 1649. Similarly, the power to make war does not lie with Parliament.

The whole question is bound up with the oath that we take. Whether they have sworn or declared and affirmed hon. Members have one thing in common. To take our seats, we have to say:

"I swear"—
or affirm—
"that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors according to law, so help me God."
The first woman elected to Parliament, Constance Markievicz, would not take that oath. I shall erect a plaque in her honour following that in honour of Emily Wilding Davison. Constance Markievicz would not take an oath of allegiance and, although she was the first woman here, she was never—and is not—recognised in this place. It is a funny thing that we should call ourselves a High Court of Parliament. People would not normally swear that oath in a court. They would swear to "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." That is not required of Members of Parliament—although it would not be a bad idea if it were. We make no pledge to our electors. I share the view that the relationship between an hon. Member and his electors is a very important one, but we do not swear to uphold the rights of our electors.

I am a Privy Councillor and, the other day, I dug out my oath:

"You will to your uttermost bear Faith and Allegiance unto the Queen's Majesty; and will assist and defend all Jurisdictions, Pre-eminences, and Authorities, granted to Her Majesty, and annexed to the Crown by Acts of Parliament . . . against all Foreign Princes, Persons, Prelates, States, or Potentates."

What about Jacques Delors? And what about President Bush with his 30,000 troops in Britain? When I reached the end of the Privy Councillor's oath, I said "I haven't said anything." I was told, "You don't have to say anything. We've administered the oath." In our system an oath is like an injection. One does not even have to say that one agrees.

The relationship between Church and state is very important. The previous Prime Minister created 33 bishops—including two Archbishops of Canterbury—which is not bad for one person. In 1953 I attended the coronation—for the reason that I gave, which is that I find such occasions most educational. I noted then that the only pledge that the archbishops asked the Queen to give was as follows:

"Will you, to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? . . . Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England and the doctrine, worship, discipline and government thereof? will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their Charge, all such rights and privileges?"

The Queen replied

"All this I promise to do."

I then looked up what a bishop says when he is appointed and I had a bit of a job getting the information. The new Archbishop of Canterbury would have recounted this homage:

"I"—
George Carey, I suppose—
"having been elected"—
well, that's a bit of a laugh—
"confirmed and consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury
do hereby declare
that your Majesty is the only supreme governor of this your realm
in spiritual and ecclesiastical things
as well as in temporal".

That is to say, the Church and the King or Queen are bound together in that way. The history of that is interesting. Henry VIII nationalised the Church of England. It is our oldest nationalised industry. He wanted a priest in every pulpit on every Sunday telling the people that what the King said was what God wanted them to do. Charles II nationalised the Post Office in 1660 because he wanted to open people's letters and the only way in which he could do that was to have a Royal Mail. The Tories nationalised the BBC because they wanted a pundit telling people every night that there was no alternative to what the Government wanted people to do. The relationship between Church and state and Crown and subject is very subtle.

If people think I am talking about ancient history, they should remember what hon. Members say when they attend Prayers. An hour ago we said:

"Almighty God, by whom alone Kings reign, and Princes decree justice; and from whom alone cometh all counsel, wisdom, and understanding;"

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is that what is said?

Mr. Benn: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover may not have been present, but I have heard that said many times.

It is not possible to discuss the matter without considering the Crown. I am perhaps one of the few people who, as a lifelong republican, has no ill-will towards the royal family. Willie Hamilton used to come here and make fun of the royal family, but I think that that is insulting. After all, the Queen did not choose the job, although I suppose she could have given it up. However, the Crown is a totally insupportable basis for a constitution. I read yesterday that both Houses of Congress were very polite to the Queen when she addressed them. Why was that? The answer is that she had no power there. If she had been George III, it would have been a very different business.

In 1791 Tom Paine said of the crown:

"But, after all, what is this metaphor called a Crown, or rather, what is monarchy? Is it a thing, or is it a name, or is it a fraud? Is it 'a contrivance of human wisdom', or of human craft to obtain money from a nation under specious pretences? Is it a thing necessary to a nation? If it is, in what does that necessity consist, what services does it perform, what is its business, and what are its merits?"

I share that view. When I read that Princess Anne was to give a lecture in memory of Tom Paine, I wondered whether members of the royal family were moving towards a similar view.

I am of the opinion that we should adhere to the sovereignty of the people. On 1 May 1649—an early May day—John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn produced

"The Agreement of the People"

and this is the basis upon which we should restructure our method of government. They wrote:

"We, the free People of England,"—
this was before the Act of Union—
"to whom God hath given hearts, means and opportunity to effect the same, do with submission to his wisdom, in his name, and desiring the equity thereof may be to his praise and glory; Agree to ascertain our Government to abolish all arbitrary Power, and to set bounds and limits both to our Supreme, and all Subordinate Authority, and remove all known Grievances. And accordingly do declare and publish to all the world, that we are agreed as followeth,

That the Supreme Authority of England and the Territories therewith incorporate, shall be and reside henceforth in a Representative of the people consisting of four hundred persons, but no more; in the choice of whom (according to natural right) all men of the age of one and twenty years and upwards (not being servants, or receiving alms, or having served the King . . .) shall have their voices."

[Mr. Benn]

That was a basic principle. If we are going to unpick the British constitution, we must go back to that.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The right hon. Gentleman had no need to apologise when he referred to England. His statement with regard to England was perfectly accurate. Does he accept that Scotland has a different constitutional history founded on the declaration of Arbroath of 1320? The Scottish Constitutional Convention, to which the Labour party in Scotland and my party have contributed, is based on a claim of right that asserts the sovereignty of the Scottish people.

Mr. Benn: I agree and Keir Hardie advocated that view. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire has, by coincidence, come top in the ballot for motions just when I am about to present a Bill to the House on Monday on which I have worked for five years. My Bill is entitled the Commonwealth of Britain Bill and its long title states:

"Bill to Establish a democratic, federal and secular Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Wales dedicated to the welfare of all its citizens; to establish fundamental human rights within that Commonwealth; to lower the voting age to 16 years and to make other provision with respect to elections, including equal representation for women; to prescribe a constitutional oath; to establish a Commonwealth Parliament consisting of the House of Commons and the House of the People and to make provision for the term of a Parliament and for legislative and other procedure; to establish the office of a President, and a Council of State, and to prescribe the powers of each; to provide for the formation of governments; to amend the law relating to official information, the armed forces and the security services; to make fresh provision for the participation of Britain in the United Nations Organisation and the European Communities; to make the basing of foreign forces in Britain dependent upon the approval of the House of Commons; to make new provision with respect to the judicial system and to establish a National Legal Service; to set up national Parliaments for England, Scotland and Wales; to amend the law relating to local government, the district auditor and the accountability of police forces; to end the constitutional status of the Crown and to make certain consequential provision; to abolish the House of Lords and the Privy Council, to end the recognition in law of personal titles, and to provide for the acknowledgement of service to the community; to disestablish the Church of England, abolish the offence of blasphemy, and to provide for equality under the law for all religions and beliefs; to end British jurisdiction in Northern Ireland; to provide for a Constitution and for constitutional amendment; and to make transitional and related provision."

I have introduced parts of the Bill as other Bills over the past 10 years and the Crown has always readily assented to place its consent at the disposal of the House for the purpose of debating those Bills. However, there is a long radical tradition, of which the long title of my Commonwealth of Britain Bill is a summary, of people who have taken a contrary view to that expressed by the right hon. Member for Brent, North.

Contrary to the popular mythology that this country has been ruined by lazy workers, militant shop-stewards, incompetent managers and political extremists, what is really wrong in Britain is wrong at the very top where powerful people have succeeded in protecting their position and their privileges. We are always boasting that Britain is the mother of Parliaments and that the whole world envies our system of government. The truth is that under the cover of a mass of ritual and tradition, this House of Commons has become a shell concealing its political impotence against the Executive under a cloak of panoply, and has surrendered one by one the rights which earlier generations wrested so painfully from the authorities of their day.

In conclusion, if hon. Members are inclined to laugh at my proposals, I can say only that my experience of change is as follows: to begin with, if you advocate reform, it is ignored. Then it is mad. If you continue after they say you are mad, it is dangerous. Then there is a long pause and then you cannot find anyone who did not agree with it in the first place. It was by that means that the peerage and referendum Acts were carried.

If there is a criterion by which we should judge people with political power, I offer the House five questions that I have developed during my time in the House. When we meet a powerful person, we should ask those five questions: What power do you have? Where did you get it? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? How can we get rid of you? If we put those five questions to people with power, we will identify the right guiding principle upon which to base a modern constitution for this country, for our relations with Europe and the United States and its bases and possibly for a new world order which is not dominated by one super-power.

10.48 am

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): The whole House is indebted to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) not only for the choice of subject but for the thoughtful way in which he introduced it. It was refreshing to hear a Liberal Democrat make a speech on constitutional reform without mentioning proportional representation. Therefore, his points are all the more to be appreciated and seriously considered.

The House is indebted also to two Privy Councillors for their speeches. Both speeches were instructive and based upon much common sense, particularly the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). However, the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), which I enjoyed also, was airy-fairy and theoretical and took the matter away from reality and from what can be done as opposed to what should be done. One has many more questions about his propositions than one might have supposed. Although many things are desirable and although many improvements could be made, the great practical problem is always how we do something and how we achieve the objective. That is why the right hon. Gentleman's questions are very important and illustrate the nub of the problem.

What has evolved in our constitution has evolved as a result of pressures. For example, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield spoke about constitutional reform. He mentioned William the Conqueror and said that the 1215 and 1832 reforms were constitutional reforms. He was actually talking about the redistribution of power, which he would say is constitutional reform but which is not all-inclusive. The mechanics of the constitution are not necessarily anything to do with the redistribution of power.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield is a contemporary of mine in many ways, although on the other side of the political scene. He did not address the problem of how we make improvements based upon practical knowledge and reality, but spoke about the theoretical concept of ways in which one might achieve an ideal system of democracy. Sovereignty, for example, is

one such idea that can easily be misunderstood. Sovereignty is simply the right to do as one wishes without being overridden by an external authority. Sovereignty of this kind applies only to a state, and that is of great importance to us in the United Kingdom.

Clearly, in reality, what we can do as a sovereign state is subject to our desire to obtain benefits by co-operation with others. We sign treaties which limit our sovereignty. We engage in understandings. We become allied to others for the purposes of defence. We commit ourselves to all sorts of things that limit our sovereignty. We do not need the treaty of Rome to establish that. We have constantly abrogated our sovereignty to some extent. It is happening all the time. It happens in reality, with or without giving legislative recognition to it. One of the problems in debating a subject of this kind, important though it is, lies in trying to be clear about what we are discussing and not to introduce, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield occasionally did, concepts such as votes for women, the Scottish Assembly, and so on.

Mr. Benn: The hon. Gentleman may not know it, but women actually have votes now. If I advocated it, it was not a radical proposal.

Mr. Stanbrook: I was assuming that the right hon. Gentleman was taking an historical perspective in which he wanted votes for women, and that he was accusing the Liberal Democrats of having opposed votes for women —through their own leader, at one stage. Those are interesting developments along the road to the redistribution of power. The extension of suffrage to universal adult suffrage takes time and still does not exist in many parts of the world. No doubt, if the right hon. Gentleman were still in an Administration who had an empire, he would insist upon the colonies adopting universal adult suffrage throughout the empire. We were never able to do so, because, naturally, we took account of the wishes of the people concerned.

I was interested in the approach of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire because it seemed fundamentally to be that of the centre party. If it were possible to stand back from our political spectrum and address the overall problem, we would first have to say, "What an enormous lot we are agreed on." A huge number of political subjects are covered by consensus and we do not even discuss them in this place. It is true that we spend much of our time discussing marginal issues that are apparently important and certainly topically important from time to time, but the essential and fundamental matters and the institutions of our constitution are not often challenged. Why is that? It is because we know that they work pretty well. We should take, for example, what is singular in all advanced civilised states of the world—our parliamentary system. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield laughed about it. I do not see why he should. In some ways ours is the best system of democracy.

Representatives of the people are elected. Forget about mechanisms, proportional representation and all the rest of it. Representatives of the people are elected to exercise total power over the country. That is our system. It does not exist in the United States. The United States constitution was written a couple of centuries ago by theorists like the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. It was written according to the needs of the age those two centuries ago. It may have been necessary then, but it now inhibits progress in the United States. We do not have that system here. We have a wonderful system that happens to have evolved naturally. Of course, one of the right hon. Gentleman's objections to our present system is that at the apex of this parliamentary system there is—there must be in logic—one individual.

Mr. Tony Banks: Elect him or her.

Mr. Stanbrook: The hon. Gentleman says, "Elect him or her." However, that is where the genius of the British people, their evolution and experience in the world come in. We are an island race. We have not been conquered for 1,000 years. We have our own way of evolving what is best for us.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have been listening closely to what he is saying. Until now in this discussion of the power of this place, he has made no mention whatsoever of the European Community, the institution of the European Commission and the secretive decision making of the Councils of Ministers. We are witnessing the continuing diminution of parliamentary power and the growth of the untrammelled, unrestrained power of strategic decision making in Brussels. The hon. Gentleman surely has to face up to that struggle of power between the 12 national legislature in the European Community and the power—the quite remarkable power—of the European Commissioners and the Councils of Ministers.

Mr. Stanbrook: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) for listening to me so closely. I take his point. He is talking about a further evolution by which, whether we like it or not, in practice or by legislative decision, we are becoming part of a greater whole. He is referring to no more than the problems that faced the Scottish Parliament before the Union. Did Scottish people want to be governed as a small part of the United Kingdom from the capital of the partner, England, where the vast majority of Members of Parliament would not be Scottish? No doubt, that was part of the argument and no doubt it provided a good debate. We are talking of transferring such a problem on to a European stage. Britain is no longer so great a power in the world that it is in any sense truly sovereign. Therefore, Parliament does not have the relationship with the rest of the country that it enjoyed in earlier centuries. I accept that point.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be open to this Parliament at any time to resolve to leave the European Community if Parliament deemed it to be in our national interest? We are not bound to the Community indefinitely or, indeed, any longer than we perceive that to be in our national interest. Similarly, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be extremely unlikely that the Queen would refuse to give Royal Assent to a Bill such as that proposed by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)?

Mr. Stanbrook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point for me. That is precisely the position in which we are placed in Britain. We are not building a constitution from nothing. We do not say that our system is perfect. It is not necessary for us to elect the person at the very top of the system—the head of state. It is not necessary——

Mr. Arbuthnot: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that it is against the rules of the House to call an hon. Member a liar. I should like to ask your advice on the status of a candidate who has been elected to the House but has not yet taken his seat. In the Monmouth by-election yesterday, statements were made which were clearly lies. Can we have an early debate on the importance of truth in electioneering and the apparently new policy of not proportional representation but distortional representation by the Labour party?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman asks for a debate on a certain matter. He should refer the matter to the usual channels and find out whether there is time for a debate on it.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point that we have just heard has been well rehearsed by the Tory party, which is whingeing in defeat after the Monmouth result. The hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and the pompous schoolboy type who is now Secretary of State for Health are casting a slur on the people of Monmouth who made that historic decision yesterday.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Decisions on those matters have been taken outside the House. Let us get on with the debate.

Mr. Richard Holt. (Langbaurgh): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are discussing the constitution. It strikes me that in the House of Commons there is one rule for the vast majority of us and a separate rule for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). You made a ruling a moment ago. You said that the matter was not a point of order. Every one of us respected that decision and kept our seats, except the hon. Member for Bolsover who seems to have the right not to respect the Chair.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that I have to listen to ascertain whether a point of order is a point of order or not. I made it plain that the decisions were made outside the House and had nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Stanbrook: It is not necessary for us to elect our head of state. To do so would not perfect our democracy, even if that were possible. It so happens that, by experience and general practice under our constitution, we have evolved a system whereby the head of state is automatically created. The head of state is non-political and does not interfere in party politics. The head of state is subject to the golden rule—as Dicey described it—of the supremacy of Parliament. [*Interruption.*] One of the worst things about this place is the party game which often obsesses us when we should be discussing more serious matters. I hope that hon. Members, especially the Whips —[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Member for Orpington, who has the Floor, will get on with what he has to say.

Mr. Stanbrook: I am much obliged, Madam Deputy Speaker. It would be a great help if I had an attentive audience for a moment.

I was dealing with the position of the Queen. In Britain we have evolved a system under which our head of state does not need to be elected. We need only consider the United States of America and ask ourselves whether the British people would like a system in which a party politician was the head of not only the Government but the state and was embodied with all the qualities that the British people—the subjects—regard as their corporate national identity. It is impossible for any party politician to achieve that. In a sense, the United States of America is a disunited country because it does not have our inestimable advantage of a constitutional monarchy. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield said that there were three different roles.

The constitutional monarchy is a separate institution of the state. It is not the constitution, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield sought to make out.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Stanbrook: I see that the hon. Gentleman is bursting to make a point so I shall give way to him, if that is what he wants me to do.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am not bursting to make a point. I should like to make a point and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to do so. He said that we should ask ourselves whether the people want an elected head of state. That is not the case. We should ask the people of Britain whether they want an elected head of state. They may say no, but they should at least be asked. This might be one matter on which a referendum would provide the answer.

Mr. Stanbrook: That is an interesting concept. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield is the one person who has forced a referendum in Britain. He uses that device for ascertaining opinion on membership of the European Community. With respect, he did so because he thought that the result would be to his advantage.

Everyone knows that by every test available, including the much discredited public opinion poll system, the vast majority of people have only one opinion on the monarchy. The British people like their monarchy. There is no point in going through a referendum to find out what everyone already knows. In any case, what are we here for? We are not mere symbols. We are here to exercise our judgment as individuals.

It is easy for people to agree and there are many pressures and inducements on them to go along with the party line. Parties are an essential part of our democracy. They are the means by which people of similar outlook and views can associate to obtain power. That is perfectly creditable. However, the party system can break down. There is dispute about the election mechanism and how the representatives of the people should be returned to this place.

I wish to take up the method of electing the representatives with regard to Scotland and other points which have been made about the sovereignty of the people. Sovereignty of the people is a grand concept, but one must remember that we are talking about millions of people, some of whom do not even bother to vote and do not have the slightest interest in our form of government. When one seeks some way of establishing the sovereignty of the people one ends up with a system such as ours, especially when a country has the historical tradition that we happen to have. If one started on a level playing field and built up

a constitution for a new state, one might evolve a different system; but in Britain we have a system under which the sovereignty of the people exists.

Speaking as a lawyer, I know that the practical effect of the law provides for the sovereignty of the people. That is why the right hon. Member for Chesterfield is so fundamentally wrong. He is obsessed by the form of the government and by the letter of the law. He does not see that, behind all that, the system would not exist but for the support of the people. People say that treaties are made under royal authority and refer to patronage, and so on. That is perfectly true. When such measures return to the House, would they last five minutes if they did not have the approval of the majority of Members? Of course they would not. That is the reality of the British constitution. Sovereignty is an attribute of the state. Supremacy is the quality of the House.

Mr. Benn: I respect what the hon. Gentleman is saying. We are having a serious debate. When the American forces came here after the war the Labour Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, said that they were coming on a training mission. In fact, they were establishing permanent bases. Even Parliament did not know, yet that was possible under the prerogative. When the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) signed the treaty of accession, it had not even been published, yet that was possible using the royal prerogative. The hon. Gentleman underestimates the way in which our constitution, which he has described in romantic terms, gives us the right to determine crucial matters affecting the nation's future. Will the hon. Gentleman consider those two points?

Mr. Stanbrook: I do not accept that. The right hon. Gentleman's point demonstrates the flexibility of our system. In the United States treaties and declarations of war must be approved by Congress. Such matters are subject to the will of Congress. That hiatus often produces great troubles for the Americans and results from their written constitution. We would have the same problem with a Bill of Rights. There would be no flexibility. Neither this place, nor those whom we trust on the Front Bench, would have power to make correct decisions. They would have to suspend their judgment until after a debate and vote in this place. They should know, and do know because of our party system, that they can depend on the support of the majority in the House. That is how our system works. It is not a bad one. It has produced something decent, wholesome and good. The system should be commended by us, even if, from time to time, we seek ways of improving it.

11.10 am

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): I want to say a few words about the constitutional choice facing Scotland, but first I shall pick up one or two of the general points raised about the British constitution.

As I understand the British constitution, it is a perfect mechanism for the establishment to continue to control the state as it wishes while being able to make adjustments in response to the general cry of the population from time to time, without ever giving away too much of its essential core of power.

When I was lectured on constitutional law, I was told that ours was an unwritten constitution and that, therefore, it had many inherent merits—indeed, a greater number than a written constitution. Yet when we examine this unwritten constitution, we see that it is a mirage. The nearer we get to it, the less distinct it becomes. When we reach out for something solid within it, there is nothing whatever, except what the establishment will tell us is the convention of the day. That is my understanding of the position. It is an undemocratic system on which to found a modern state as we approach the 21st century.

It would be much better to have a written constitution that laid down basic individual human rights. It would then become the superior legal instrument of the state. No Parliament and no monarch or anyone else could climb above it. All would be subject to basic principles on how the state should run its affairs in relation to the individual. We hope that that will be the case in an independent Scotland.

Even if the population wishes to retain a monarch for whatever reasons, sentimental or based on folklore or on mythology, the existence of a written constitution would fundamentally transform the role of the monarch inside the state. At present, the monarch is above the law, at least in the English constitution. I shall return to that in a minute. That is the theory. With a written constitution, the monarch could not be above the law. The monarch might be an elevated person, but he or she would be just one person among millions governed by the written constitution. When that happens, the basic background power, about which the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was talking, disappears automatically, because power is vested in the written constitution on behalf of the people. I insert those general remarks into our extremely good discussion.

I must tell the right hon. Members for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) and for Chesterfield that it is always nice to have one's prejudices and views confirmed. Their speeches confirmed me in my opinion that the quicker Scotland is independent and people like me are away from here altogether, the better it will be for our country. [HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Gentleman will be away from here soon."] That is interesting, because yesterday most Members of Parliament got some sort of pre-election document about marginal seats and I am not in it. I expect to be returned—but, unfortunately, here—after the general election. I look forward to the day when I or someone else will take my seat, not here, but——

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In the House of Lords.

Mr. Sillars: No, the Scottish National party will not take any seat in the House of Lords. We will not in any way whatever give that place any democratic legitimacy. I regret that the Labour party has not adopted our view. That is a digression and I do not want to be put off making my remarks on the Scottish position.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North made a valid point about Scotland in response to my intervention. He said that comprehensive education in a sense grew out of the social, political and cultural soil of Scotland. We are an egalitarian society, so comprehensive education fits in exactly with the political and social climate that we have created. I was fascinated when the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In that famous or infamous speech, depending on one's view, she invoked several great figures

[Mr. Sillars]

from the Scottish enlightenment, but missed one. Whether it was deliberate or she could not bring herself to mention him, we know not, but she missed the greatest figure, Robert Burns.

Burns is the man whose philosophy has had the greatest influence on the creation of egalitarian ideas in Scotland. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield told us all about patronage. As he spoke, I was reminded of Burns' poem that:

"A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke and a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith; he maunna fa' that."

The essence of the Scottish view lies within that short quotation. We are all Jock Tamson's bairns. Nobody should be elevated above anyone else. We are all human beings with considerable qualities and a contribution to make to our decent society. Because we are a different nation with a different set of philosophical principles, we can operate them only by having a Government of our own.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield was, as ever, fascinating. I am extremely glad that in my parliamentary life I have bumped up against intellects such as his. He has strong views, but is always willing to listen to every other view and give an intellectual argument the utmost respect. He talked about what is essentially the English constitution. The Scottish constitutional position does not accord with it. I refer him to further research, particularly to Lord President Cooper's speech in the Court of Session in the 1953 case, McCormick *v.* Lord Advocate, in which he described Mr. Dicey as an extremely cynical individual. He pointed out that the Scottish constitutional view of the sovereignty of Parliament did not concur with that of Mr. Dicey, that we took an entirely different view and that we believed in the sovereignty of the people.

As the right hon. Gentleman delved into the democratic tradition of what he thought was Britain, he was drawing entirely upon the English experience. He was almost wholly ignorant of the Scottish contribution over a long period to the idea that the monarch should not be all-powerful and that the people themselves should be sovereign. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) quoted the declaration of Arbroath in 1320. He could have quoted the legal case when James VI was on the Scottish throne only and thought that he could not be taken to the King's court. The judges ruled that he was no different from anyone else and that if he had violated the law, he had to turn up in court and be judged like everyone else.

The great problem that I have with people such as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield is not that they are malicious—he is not, because he is in favour of home rule—but that when it comes to an essential interpretation of circumstances and power he, like many others, forgets about us altogether.

Mr. Benn: I do not want to disturb the courteous words that the hon. Gentleman is using and, as he knows, I am only half English. If he considers Tom Johnson's "History of the Scottish Working Class Movement", which he will no doubt know very well, he will discover similar traditions in England and in Scotland. Slavery existed in Scotland at one time. The hon. Gentleman may think that the Scots have been oppressed by the English, but England is the last colony of the British Empire. The Scots may get out of the system under which we are governed earlier than we do. The hon. Gentleman would do better to draw a parallel between our traditions rather than suggest that my speech should have been twice as long in order to consider the great contribution of the Scots.

Mr. Sillars: I am aware of the right hon. Gentleman's Paisley ancestry so he need not worry about that. I want to disabuse him of the idea that people like me think that the Scots have been oppressed by the English. That is not the case and I have not argued that for a single minute.

I believe that we are badly governed under the present system and that, in Scotland, principles of political policy that were born in England are visited upon us. They are not put upon us maliciously, but they are sometimes derived from ignorance, indifference or from the belief that that is the medicine that the Scots require. That is the message we got in the past 10 years of what is known as "Thatcherism"—people with a dependent mentality needed a strong dose of what came from Finchley.

Unfortunately, there is a difference of political philosophy north and south of the border. That does not mean that there are no radical traditions in England from which we have not learned, contributed towards or received contributions from. The rise of the trade union movement shows that there is no such thing as an artificial dividing line either within the United Kingdom or anywhere else. The Transport and General Workers Union has members in the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Gibraltar and elsewhere. I am not guilty of the implied charge made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield.

Scotland faces a number of choices. The first is the status quo in which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland believes. Another is devolution and then there is our policy of independence within the European Community. I shall not spend a lot of time on the status quo. It carries with it an alien philosophy which would never become the governing idea in an independent Scotland.

For the first time outside the parameters of the Scottish Constitutional Convention I shall concentrate on its option and subject it to critical analysis. That has to be done and I do not think that anybody in the convention would object to me doing so.

Mr. Stanbrook: Before the hon. Gentleman does that, will he explain what he means by Scottish independence within the European Community? The Scottish National party always qualifies independence in that way. The European Community exercises powers over the United Kingdom, so does the hon. Gentleman believe that an independent Scotland should accept the restrictions on sovereignty that now apply to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Sillars: Yes, we would have exactly the same status as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, France, Germany and the other member states. Both north and south of the border and in Northern Ireland and Wales, we are tied to the Community not constitutionally, but economically for trading purposes.

The Scottish Constitutional Convention suggests that a solution is possible within the context of the United Kingdom. The Scottish National party did not join that convention because it is not our policy. It would have been wrong of us to lend our weight to something in which we

do not believe. We do not believe that it is correct to establish an assembly within the United Kingdom. We have said practically nothing about the convention policy until now because we felt that it was quite proper to allow the convention time to develop and debate its ideas, to produce a package and to promulgate it throughout Scotland. However, there comes a time when the ideas must be subjected to criticism by people who do not necessarily agree with them.

The first point, which is a constitutional one, will interest hon. Members from England. Can unilateral devolution be delivered by the House of Commons? I do not believe that it can. The decision will have to be made here by a majority of hon. Members from English constituencies, and they are bound to ask "What is the cost to the English political system of Scottish devolution?" I bear in mind Enoch Powell's accurate definition of devolution—power and sovereignty retained in the House of Commons.

It has been suggested that if there were an assembly in Edinburgh only Scots would be able to deal with educational policy for Scotland. Fine, everyone can agree to that. But Scotland sends 72 Members of Parliament to this place and they vote on the education of the constituents of the right hon. Member for Brent, North. From the English point of view, there are constitutionally valid arguments against that, the most important being that it is profoundly undemocratic for me to claim that I can vote in my own back patch and then come here to impose my views on others. That is the unsolved problem which lies at the heart of the convention package.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman raises an important problem, but I remind him that it is not a new one. It was discussed at great length during the debates on the measures introduced for home rule for Ireland and then Ulster from 1886 to 1920. After discussing various options, a solution was adopted in the Government of Ireland Act 1920 which reduced representation roughly in proportion to the revenue raised by different institutions. Should the problem arise again there is no reason why a similar solution should not be adopted.

Mr. Sillars: I do not see that arithmetic has anything to do with the principle. For example, suppose the number of Scottish Members of Parliament were reduced from 72 to 50, the principle would remain the same. Let us consider a hypothetical position in which a Labour Government had a very slim majority in the House of Commons borrowed from hon. Members from Scotland. That Government would not have a majority within the English polity. Would the English accept or object to that scenario?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, and does not he agree that he is putting to the House the West Lothian question, which, for more than a decade, the devolutionists have wholly failed to answer because, in the words of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), there is no answer?

Mr. Sillars: I do not believe that there is an answer. My complaint about the constitutional convention is that it has either asked that question in private, so that it does not have to answer it in public, or it has deliberately refused to ask it in private, so that it does not need to answer it in public. However, it will have to answer that question in the public debate which has now begun.

The position of the Secretary of State for Scotland in the Cabinet raises the same problem. If his powers were devolved to a Scottish assembly in Edinburgh, what function would he have inside the Cabinet? Would English Members be content with what they would regard as a disproportionate amount of influence being exercised by Scottish Members and the Secretary of State for Scotland? That is why I do not believe that the convention package can be delivered once it is subject to a line-by-line examination, even supposing such a Bill is ever introduced.

There are other problems, not so much of constitutional principle, but relating to the fact that constitutional power relates to the ability to run the country. Major problems arise out of the package as put forward. It is being sold north of the border as a powerful Scottish parliament, yet it is clear from the document that it would not have macro powers over the economy. There is talk of strategic economic authority, but it is a different matter when it comes to macro economic powers. They are not supposed to be assigned to the parliament in Edinburgh.

I have written to Canon Kenyon Wright, who has been in correspondence with the Prime Minister claiming that the Prime Minister has been unfair to the constitutional convention by suggesting that it might increase taxation in Scotland to an insupportable level. I wrote to Canon Kenyon Wright, who is the executive chairman of the constitutional convention, asking him the simple but important question whether the Scottish parliament as he proposes it would have unlimited additional taxation powers or would be capped. If he said that it would be capped by 1p, 2p or 3p, the Scottish people might believe that that was a price worth paying. We are entitled to an answer to that question.

There is a degree of dishonesty in the convention's document. It talks about the functions, powers and responsibilities of the Scottish parliament over fisheries and agriculture and claims that it would have a special role in the European Community. It says:

> "Scotland's parliament should establish a representative office in Brussels to facilitate relations between itself and the European Community institutions."

There is nothing new in that. The Italian ice cream manufacturers do it now. It goes on:

> "There should be a statutory entitlement for Scotland's parliament and/or executive to be represented in United Kingdom ministerial delegations to the Council of Ministers."

Does that mean that the Scottish Minister from Edinburgh in the devolved parliament would go to Brussels with the United Kingdom Minister and cast a different vote from him? Would they cast a block vote of 10, or, when there was a difference of opinion, would they split the vote 7-3, 5-5 or 8-2? What would happen if there were a Labour Minister from north of the border and a Tory Minister from the United Kingdom Parliament? The proposition is made by fools or by people who are engaged in putting a fraudulent prospectus before the Scottish people.

Dr. Godman: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman on many points. In particular, I cannot accept his allegation that the genuine, decent and honourable people who formed the convention are dishonest. The only supporter the hon. Gentleman has in the House when he makes the claim of their fraudulent behaviour is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member

[Dr. Godman]

for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who wants the United Kingdom to remain as it is. Perhaps the convention has not solved to his own satisfaction the immense constitutional problems to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) refers, but the only way in which those immense issues can be dealt with is by setting up an independent Scotland. I repeat, the people involved are not dishonest.

Mr. Sillars: I would not dream of calling, and would not be allowed to call, the hon. Gentleman dishonest. If the convention members have been sitting for two years and the best he can do is put in that plea for clemency —that these are extremely important issues which are difficult to resolve—one must reply that the convention was set up to resolve them. It was designed to analyse and take apart the problems and produce a solution to Scotland's problem. The hon. Gentleman is a member of the convention. Will he explain how we shall resolve the power equation in a joint delegation to the European Community when there is a fundamental difference of policy between Scottish and United Kingdom Ministers? Who will wield the 10 votes?

Dr. Godman: How would the hon. Gentleman solve the problem of the relationship between an independent Scotland—having got to that point—and the United Kingdom Parliament and constitution and the constitution of the European Community? His party ducks many questions concerning the position of an independent Scotland within the European Community.

Mr. Sillars: We are not ducking any questions. If we vote for our independence and the European Community is the democratic institution that it claims to be, it should acknowledge that declaration for member state status. I am amazed at the way in which the hon. Gentleman's mind works on this issue. I do not believe that there is anything fraudulent. I would describe them as nightmares based on nothing. Somehow he believes that the Scottish people, unlike everyone else in west and east Europe, have the mark of Cain on their foreheads, marking them as different, in terms of treatment, from everyone else.

The German Democratic Republic of 18 million people, who have never been in membership of the European Community and who were in a Marxist centralist state, can perhaps join, through the back door, with West Germany. Despite all the inherent problems for the Community and the GDR, that can happen without any problem. We can entertain Norway, Sweden, Austria and even Switzerland as potential member states of the Community, but for some reason, the 5 million of us north of the border are in a different category from everyone else, even though we present no problems, except for physically finding an extra seat at the table. We have been in the Community for almost 20 years. All the necessary adjustments have been made and there is no material constitutional problem on one side or the other. But the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) finds that difficult to understand.

Dr. Godman: The hon. Gentleman is making a fascinating speech. I am perfectly willing, by the employment of a referendum, to put the three questions to the Scottish people: do we remain where we are within the United Kingdom? Do we go for the system put forward by the convention? Or do we ask the Scottish people to accept the SNP's conception of an independent Scotland? It seems that by the use of a referendum on such an immense constitutional question, we could follow the lead given by the young Irish Republic, which has sought to solve certain constitutional issues by the use of the referendum.

Mr. Sillars: One reason why we are not members of the constitutional convention is that we suggested at the negotiating meeting that there should be a three-way referendum. We asked not for a two-way referendum, because we recognised that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), though perhaps he represents a minority, was entitled to have his position tested. So we asked for a three-way referendum on the status quo, on the convention package and on independence in Europe.

The Labour party, led by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), rejected that, and the suggestion has been rejected time and again when it has been put by the leader of the SNP, my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I am pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow does not agree with the leader of the Labour party in Scotland, the hon. Member for Garscadden.

The convention is propogating the idea of entrenchment and says in paragraph 2:

> "The Convention endorses the principle of entrenchment in relation to Scotland's parliament as regards its powers, the Scottish executive and Scotland's relationship with the United Kingdom Government and the European Community, in order that these would be incapable of being unilaterally amended at a later date by the Westminster Parliament."

I cannot think how one drafts a devolution Bill which, if it does not simultaneously alter the British constitution, taking away from this House what it always claims, which is that one Parliament cannot bind its successor, can entrench a Scottish Parliament. I have tried to do so; I have had long and learned discussions with professors of constitutional law and have corresponded with lawyers from Oxford and Cambridge. None has come up with a solution.

I thought on one occasion that I had found the way, but in a single exchange of correspondence a lawyer—from, I think, Cambridge—demolished my argument in its entirety. That lawyer pointed out, quite fairly, that if the British Parliament could be persuaded to shift what is regarded as the cornerstone of its operations—the principle that one Parliament cannot bind another—a solution might be possible; such a shift is, however, a prerequisite.

Arguments are advanced by people who are too simple to understand the nature of the problem or who are—I use this term advisedly—exercising a deliberate fraud on the people of Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's prescription for an independent Scotland; however, it is significant that I, a Minister, have yet to find anyone who disagrees with his essential proposition that the entrenchment proposals are not deliverable.

Mr. Sillars: Given the party-political nature of the cockfight taking place in Scotland, my problem is that if I agree with the hon. Gentleman, or if he agrees with me, we are both damned by others—and the hon. Member for

Greenock and Port Glasgow had better be careful about agreeing with me, because he could well be damned by internal elements.

This is, however, a civilised discussion, and it is true that the problem could not be resolved when it was last debated in the House. The debate continued to dominate the Floor of the House for nearly two years: we debated the so-called West Lothian question, along with the entrenchment question. I do not believe that a solution is possible.

The people of Scotland have a choice. If they wish, they can continue as they are. The right hon. Member for Brent, North said that if something was working it should not be changed. The political system in Scotland is manifestly not working, for there is deep disillusionment, great unhappiness and a lot of anger boiling away in Scottish society. We believe that we are now being governed by an English Tory Government, and the system must change.

At the coming general election, the choice to which I referred must be between the position of the unionists—that of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and others in the Scottish Tory party who say that there should be no significant legislative constitutional change—and that of the Scottish National party, which says that Scottish people must face up to their responsibility for what has happened to their country, and accept that responsibility through independence.

11.43 am

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Before tackling one of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), let me touch on some of the remarks of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

The right hon. Gentleman said that the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, was a strong believer in proportional representation and that Mr. Scargill thought that a policy or proposal should be supported by at least 50 per cent. of the membership before being enacted. I tried, without success, to intervene. That is no criticism of the right hon. Gentleman; I merely wish to ask why, in 1985, the same Mr. Scargill refused to ballot the entire membership of the NUM on whether a strike should be called. I do not know what the right hon. Gentleman's response would have been had I put that question.

The right hon. Gentleman pointed out that new Members do not take an oath—as we would in a court of law—to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Perhaps that is just as well for the newly elected Member of Parliament for Monmouth, who has told a number of untruths during his campaign. For instance, he has said quite baldly that the local hospital is to opt out of the national health service. That is simply not true.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I hope that my hon. Friend will not be too hard on the prospective hon. Member for Monmouth, who is not alone in telling such "untruths". The same thing is being said by the bulk of the Labour party—and, I believe, by sections of the Liberal party that are resisting the establishment of NHS trusts, in my constituency and others. My hon. Friend should not be too hard on our poor new colleague.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a wide-ranging debate, but I hope that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) will relate his remarks more closely to what is one the order paper.

Mr. Riddick: Of course, I take your comments on board, Madam Deputy Speaker. My comments related to the oath that new Members of Parliament must take, but I am none the less grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), who has made his own point very well.

The fact is, however, that Labour politicians have been going round misleading members of the public about this issue. First, no decision has been made in Monmouth——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I called the hon. Gentleman to order only a few moments ago. I hope that I shall not have to do so again; I am sure that he will now relate his remarks to the oath taken by Members of Parliament, which is, I believe, what he was attempting to talk about.

Mr. Riddick: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, I take that point on board. I simply wanted to ensure that the record was put straight. Given the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and my own earlier comments, however, I think that enough has been said to ensure that the record will show the extent to which the public have been misled.

I rather agree with the hon. Member for Govan. There are, I think, many attractions in the idea of some form of Scottish assembly. The hon. Gentleman would go further; he is calling for independence within the European Community. But many Opposition Members want a Scottish assembly—indeed, it is official Labour policy. As an English Member of Parliament, I do not think that that is a bad idea.

First, Scottish Members of Parliament are grossly over-represented in the House, as the hon. Member for Govan has already pointed out. Some of us rather resent that. If we take the population of Scotland as a basis, Scotland should have between 40 and 50 Members of Parliament. As the hon. Gentleman says, at some stage in the future—although not, I hope, for some time—a Labour Government may be in power simply by virtue of those extra seats. Secondly, the Scottish people enjoy a higher level of spending per capita than the English. That is hard to justify. Giving Scotland some form of self-government would provide an opportunity for that imbalance to be reversed.

Finally—I am afraid that this is a rather blatant point—if they had some form of regional assembly the people of Scotland would experience a dose of socialism. If the opinion polls are to be believed—I see no reason why they should not be—the Labour party would probably win a majority in such an assembly; and, as history shows, whenever the British people have any experience of socialism, they reject it decisively at the next general election. I have no doubt that that would happen in Scotland—and, what is more, more Conservative Members would then be sent to the House of Comons, notwithstanding the fact that there would be fewer Scottish Members in total.

Having said that, let me add that I do not believe that a regional assembly would be good for Scotland. It would result in higher taxes and more bureaucracy. I am surprised at the hon. Member for Govan: he seems almost

[Mr. Riddick]

to want to be swallowed up by the European Community, with which Scotland's ties are surely far less secure than are its ties with England. Scotland has long-standing historical ties with England, which have stood the test of time and, surely, have done Scotland more good than ties with the Community could possibly do.

Mr. Sillars: I do not understand the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument that Scotland should remain tied to the European Community through the United Kingdom, but should not be so tied through its own independent Government. The logic escapes me.

Mr. Riddick: The fact is that this Parliament and this country have far more power and influence, because it is one of the major players on the European scene, than Scotland would have if it were one of the smaller countries in the European Community. The hon. Gentleman cannot deny that Germany, France and the United Kingdom are the big players on the European scene. That is because we are the largest industrial nations and have the largest populations.

Dr. Godman: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that for the vast majority of the people in the Irish Republic, being under the shadow of Brussels is a much better prospect than being under the shadow of London?

Mr. Riddick: That is not an option. The Republic of Ireland has had its independence for 70 years or so. That point is irrelevant in the context of this debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on initiating this interesting debate. He referred to the history of the last 25 years and to the result of a MORI poll that suggested that the British people are desperate for constitutional change. However, during the course of his congenial speech he failed to spell out how the specific changes that he wishes would be introduced. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need for regional assemblies, for a freedom of information Act and for proportional representation, but he also has a responsibility to tell the House just how he would introduce them and what form of proportional representation his party wants to introduce. That would have been helpful, but we did not get it. The truth is that his party advocates proportional representation because it believes it to be the surest way to get a taste of power.

It is revealing that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, Shirley Williams and others—and perhaps, for all I know, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—showed little interest in proportional representation when they were members of the Labour party, but they showed great interest in it once they switched parties and became part of the alliance. It was not always thus.

The report of Mr. Speaker's conference in 1916-17 unanimously concluded that proportional representation, or the single transferable vote form of proportional representation, should be introduced on an experimental basis in one third of constituencies. One comment that I read was that there could be no doubt that PR would have been carried at that time, if the Government had supported it. Lloyd George's Cabinet, however, adopted a position of neutrality and the House of Commons delivered a verdict against PR on a free vote.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is aware that flowing from the recommendation that he mentioned, proportional representation—particularly the single transferable vote form of proportional representation—was introduced and legislated for by this Parliament in the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and that consequently it went into operation both for local government and parliamentary elections in both Irish jurisdictions that were created by virtue of the Government of Ireland Act. Consequently it survives, although it is regarded as very much of a mixed blessing.

Mr. Riddick: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is advocating PR and suggesting that that was the right or the wrong thing to have happened, but the Liberal Government of the time did not believe it to be appropriate to support the case for PR in England. It is interesting that a contemporary observer noted how Asquith

"while lucidly defending the desirability of a valuable experiment was at least as lucid in explaining its unsuitability to the county of Fife, his own constituency."

The Liberal party's interest in PR has increased as its own electoral fortunes have decreased.

Mr. Maclennan: This is a point which is often wrongly made. Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that the case for proportional representation relates to the extent to which the voting system results in disproportionate representation in the House of Commons? At the time that he spoke about and until relatively recently—the last 15 years—the votes cast in the country were broadly reflected in the proportion of Members sitting in this House.

Mr. Riddick: In response to the hon. Gentleman's point, let me refer to what Lloyd George said shortly after he had lost power:

"Someone ought to have come to me in 1918 and gone into the whole matter. I was not converted then. I could have carried it when I was Prime Minister. I am afraid it is too late now."

He saw clearly that PR would have been the way to give the Liberals the chance to stay in power.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the parish councils in the constituency of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) consists 100 per cent. of Liberal Democrat members? Does my hon. Friend think that the individual members of that parish council would be, for their own purposes, in favour of proportional representation?

Mr. Riddick: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I am afraid that I know none of those parish councillors, but there is a fair chance that they may be having second thoughts about proportional representation. The fact is that PR gives power to the minority parties.

After the general election in 1987, the Conservative party polled about 43 per cent., the Labour party 31 per cent. and the Liberal Democrats 23 per cent. Having negotiated in smoke-filled rooms behind closed doors in the bowels of this building, the Liberal Democrats, with proportional representation, could have come to an agreement with the Labour party that the Liberal Democrats would support a Labour Government.

Therefore a minority Labour Government could have come to power, which I believe would have flouted the wishes of the British people.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. Friend agree that in the case of Israel the vast majority of the people there have voted either for the Likud party or for the Labour party, yet the democratic wishes of the electorate are being thwarted because a very small number of members of the Knesset, members of minority parties, are using their unrepresentative power to dictate to the people of Israel what sort of Government should govern them?

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend must have had a prior look at my notes. That was the very point that I was going to make. It is true that in some cases, and Israel is a classic case, very small minority parties are given enormous power—I would say disproportionate power. That in itself can tie the hands of the majority party. Either that can happen or, alternatively, chaos reigns. Italy is now on to its 30th, 40th or 50th Government since the last war. That is no recipe for good government.

The other possibility with proportional representation is a weak coalition Government, in which the weakest—the lowest common denominator—decide Government policy. That is because consensus has to be reached. I believe, therefore, that weak government could come about. The call for PR is all about power. One is entitled to ask how the specific party that stands to gain most from the introduction of PR would perform if it were introduced in this country. We have already had a taste of that—the infamous Lib-Lab pact in the 1970s, which was an example of a weak coalition Government. The Lib-Lab pact was a shabby affair intended to keep a discredited Government in power and to give the Liberal party a taste of power. What did the Liberals achieve? Did the right hon. Member for Tweedale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) stop the Labour Government nationalising the shipbuilding and aircraft industries? Did he reverse the closed shop legislation forcing 7 million or 8 million people to join trade unions when many did not wish to do so? Did the Liberals reverse the Education Act 1976, the provisions of which forced local authorities to turn schools into comprehensives? Did they stop the Labour Government cutting capital spending on new hospitals by 30 per cent? Did they stop the defence budget being slashed by £2·5 billion? The answer to those questions is no.

Mr. Trimble: I am a little confused. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was arguing that proportional representation gave disproportionate power to minority parties. How does he reconcile that with what he is saying?

Mr. Riddick: The obvious answer is simple: the Liberal party kept the Labour party in power. If that is not disproportionate, I do not know what is. We desperately needed a general election in 1977 so that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and the Conservatives could take office and tackle some of the fundamental problems that we have now tackled.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Is my hon. Friend aware of the more recent example of the Liberal party keeping the Labour party in power in the London borough of Brent? The Liberals have supported that tyrannical regime, to the detriment of people of the borough. It was not until two Labour Members had the courage to resign that the people of the borough were rescued.

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful for the point. Until last year, Kirklees council was hung. The Liberals refused to do a deal with the Conservatives to remove the Labour party. Nine times out of 10, they voted with Labour.

Mr. Burns: Like here.

Mr Riddick: My hon. Friend is right; nine times out of 10 they vote with the Labour party here.

Liberals on Kirklees council voted with Labour to spend almost £1 million on an unnecessary equal opportunities unit, to refuse £2·5 million of Government money for Kirklees' schools under the technical and vocational education initiative and to introduce some absurd nuclear-free zone signs. When Liberals get a taste of power, that is what they get up to.

Liberals argue for PR because they see it as the surest way of getting more power, but their record suggests that they do not deserve a greater taste of power.

12.3 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The remarks of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) would have carried more conviction if he had remainded us that after 1974 election his party attempted to negotiate with the Liberals in order to cling on to power. On reflection, he will find that his comments against the Liberals were misguided.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I do not want to be detained on this point; I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman at an appropriate point.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on instigating the debate. We do not discuss constitutional matters as often as we should. It is an opportune moment to discuss constitutional arrangements, because Britain stands at a crossroads. In 1992, with the completion of the single market, we will see further and substantial steps towards the integration of decision making in Europe. The constitution of the United Kingdom is in a poor shape to meet that challenge and needs drastic overhaul. It is not capable of providing a check and balance against Westminster, let alone Brussels. Nor can it provide the regions and nations of Britain with the opportunities that they need and want in the new Europe.

I disagree with the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), who is no longer in his place, who said that change is not necessary. Change is not only necessary but vital if we are to respond to the challenges that Europe presents. Our constitution was designed for the 19th century nation state, not a Europe of regions without frontiers. A new political and economic focus for the regions and nations of Britain and a new constitutional settlement for the citizens of the United Kingdom and Europe are essential.

Electoral reform has been mentioned by many hon. Members, though strangely not as much as one might have expected by the Liberals. One concludes that the rush of blood to the head of the leadership of the Liberal Democrats after the local elections a fortnight ago and the Ribble Valley by-election has subsided in the light of last night's result in Monmouth.

In 1989, the Labour party signalled that, in addition to establishing national and regional assemblies, it might be

[Mr. Darling]

appropriate to elect the new bodies by a system different from first past the post. Last year, we established a working party under the chairmanship of Professor Plant to study the electoral systems that might be applied to the different bodies of this country. I am a member of the working party. We have completed much work and hope to publish an interim report in July. There is nothing else that I can usefully say, except to make the general point, in response to the comments of the hon. Member for Colne Valley and others on the question of fairness, that, having studied the subject in depth, I have reached the conclusion that there are advantages and disadvantages with any system. No system can claim to be perfect; we are not dealing with a perfect science. It is perfectly possible to have a different electoral system for different elected bodies. It is not necessary to apply the same system to every body that we elect.

This has been a useful debate and, as there will be little business in the long summer months, perhaps we should return to the matter. Perhaps the Government should instigate a debate on constitutional reform. It appears that there will be no general election in June, so in the months ahead Parliament could usefully discuss such matters.

We do not often discuss our relationship with the regions and nations of Britain or with Europe. It appears that the Government are hopelessly adrift, have lost direction and are hoping that something will turn up, so we can have such discussions in the next few months.

May I deal with a point that was made by the hon. Member for Colne Valley and an organised smear earlier in the debate? I hope that in the long, hot summer ahead some of the intemperate comments that we have heard in the past few hours, which are thoroughly unsuitable for the classroom let alone the Cabinet room, are stopped. I believe that the Prime Minister is a decent man, no matter what I think of his policies. I hope that he will tell his colleagues to get a grip of themselves and stop using language that is inappropriate to the conduct of political debate.

Mr. Riddick: The leader of the Labour party should get a grip on his candidates in by-elections and ensure that they do not tell lies. If he is not prepared to do so——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. That has nothing to do with the motion.

Mr. Riddick: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was simply responding to the point that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) made. You did not pull him up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I was busy in the Chair making some notes. I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will refer directly to the motion.

Mr. Darling: I was referring to the language that we use rather than to particular points. I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because he raised the matter. I shall not prolong the matter because the point has been made.

Constitutional change will be part of the next general election campaign. The economy, health and education will dominate that campaign, but the need to protect individual rights and to decentralise power from Whitehall to the regions and nations will be important. They will once again show the philosophical difference between the Conservative and Labour parties. I welcome the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) who raised a number of interesting matters to which I have no doubt that we shall return on more than one occasion.

We propose to give real power and choice to the citizens of this country. Under the Conservative Government, the United Kingdom has become one of the most centralised of the large countries in the European Community. Over the past 12 years, local government has been taken over by central Government; Ministers have acquired more power and under the Education Reform Act 1988 the Secretary of State took up on himself 200 more powers. From hospitals to housing; from schools to social services, Whitehall and Tory Ministers say that they know best. On civil liberties, we must not forget that the Government organised a midnight raid on the BBC in Glasgow to recover tapes of programmes that they did not like. In 1987, the Government impounded copies of *Pravda* at Heathrow so that British people should not know what every Soviet citizen knew—what was in the book "Spycatcher".

We shall introduce legislation that will, for the first time, set out clear and specific rights and remedies available to every British citizen. Our charter of rights, published in January this year, has set out our programe. We shall provide for a Freedom of Information Act, which is long overdue. We shall provide laws to protect privacy and to strengthen the data protection provisions, including the implementing of substantial parts of the Calcutt report. We shall put the security service on a proper footing, making it answerable to a Select Committee of the House. We shall legislate to promote equality of opportunity. They are specific rights. I have yet to be persuaded about a Bill of Rights. I have no objection in principle to such a Bill, but it is important to avoid room for judicial manoeuvre. This Parliament—or the regional or national parliaments—should be able to spell out specific rights so that citizens are left in no doubt about where they stand. These rights are essential and long overdue in the United Kingdom, but they will be even more necessary in the Europe without frontiers.

Mr. Sillars: Would those rights be justiciable?

Mr. Darling: There is nothing in the land that would not be justiciable. For example, under the Freedom of Information Act the system that we envisage is that a request for information would have to be answered within 30 days. In the event of the commissioner's saying that the information was not to be released, that would be justiciable.

I think that the point that brought the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) to his feet was that under a Bill of Rights, which would tend to contain general assertions, the room for judicial manoeuvre would be considerably greater than if there were tightly drawn legislation, which reduced the scope for a judge to decide that no matter what Parliament thought that it had decided, something else was intended.

Mr. Wallace: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Labour party were to come to power and legislate for citizens' rights, a succeeding Conservative Government, who were elected on the basis of 40 or 42 per cent. of the

electorate and had absolute power, could legislate away those rights as easily as the Labour party could legislate for them?

Mr. Darling: I shall deal with that point a little later. The hon. Member knows that in our proposals to reform the second Chamber, we propose to give it the power to delay—no more than delay—any attempt to tear up what we regard as fundamental rights, such as a Freedom of Information Act. The supremacy of Parliament means that no Parliament can bind its successors. The best that we can do under the present constitutional arrangements is to make it more difficult and especially to force a Government to fight a general election on the proposal to tear up what I regard as fundamental rights.

I was referring to Europe because it is the driving force that will force us to amend our constitutional arrangements, and there is one especially striking example. After 1992, EC citizens will be able to move around Europe with their families, and frontiers will largely disappear. However, individuals will be subject to internal controls, certainly on continental Europe where they will be stopped and asked to account for themselves at various stages. Immigration authorities and police will have access to a common information system. Without data protection legislation and freedom of information legislation extending across Europe, citizens will be at a disadvantage against the bureaucracy that will be set up. Therefore, it is essential not only that we set out citizens' rights in the United Kingdom, but that the Government should argue in Europe that the same rights should be available to all EC citizens no matter where they happen to be in Europe at any time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield raised an important matter with which I shall now deal —the royal prerogative. The treaties that are being entered into and the agreements made between Ministers in connection with the freedom of movement reveal the problems that we face. Ministers are doing things in the name of the Crown, for which they are not properly answerable in Chamber. They are being done under the royal prerogative which gives Ministers the right to do more or less whatever they want. It is rare for a Minister to come to the Dispatch Box to account to Parliament for what he has done.

It is essential that when the royal prerogative is to be used, Parliament must be able to give or withhold its consent to proposals that Ministers bring before it. Ministers should not be able to go to Brussels and sign away the rights of the citizens of this country without Parliament's having an opportunity to decide whether it supports those proposals. It is essential that the royal prerogative powers are substantially trimmed. That is what we propose and what we have set out clearly not only in our policy review documents over the past two years, but in our charter of rights published in January this year.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield also made an important point about patronage. One of the reasons why we want to establish regional assemblies in England and national assemblies in Scotland and in Wales is that we believe that the scope for patronage from Ministers in the House of Commons should be curtailed. It is unjustifiable that the Secretary of State for Health, for example, can pack health boards with people merely because he believes that they will support his political party in ramming through reforms that no one living in the regions or in the localities wants. With reference to what my right hon. Friend said about Privy Councillors, I have yet to meet one who is willing to give it up. I wonder whether in addition to the oath being administered, it also said that one would be guaranteed to be called whenever one wanted for any debate. That appears to be the most compelling reason to become a Privy Councillor.

It is essential that rights are protected across Europe. The charter of rights that we have proposed for the United Kingdom will always be incomplete unless it is accepted that those rights are available in Europe. I said that a Freedom of Information Act and stronger data protection provisions are needed. It is interesting that the data protection provisions directive promulgated by the EC, which would go some way—although not as far as I should like—to improve the situation across Europe, is, I understand, to be blocked by the Government. That is indicative of precisely what is wrong with the Government —they will not accept that individual rights are very much on the political agenda in Britain and that people's concerns must be met.

It is also interesting that although we have heard much about the social charter and the promotion of employment rights in Europe, there is little legislation to outlaw racial discrimination. For all the criticisms that I and others in my party make of the Government on that subject, it must be said that Britain has a far better record than many other European countries on legislation to protect individuals against racial discrimination. It is essential that when Europe deals with the rights and remedies available to its citizens, especially when there is increased freedom of movement for some, but not for all those living in the EC, we must strengthen legislation to outlaw discrimination no matter where it occurs.

Mr. Bowis: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that at the time of the Notting Hill riots, it was not written changes in the constitution or changes in the law which put a stop to them, but firm action in the courts? The great danger of having a written constitution is that the courts will be so tied down in the details and niceties of the law that they would not be able to extend the law as they are now able to do by setting precedents.

Mr. Darling: I was not advocating a written constitution and I do not want to go into that subject unless the hon. Gentleman wants me to do so. I agree that one of the problems of a written constitution is that it provides a field day for lawyers, and I speak as a lawyer. Although it is tempting professionally to advocate something that would keep me in living for the rest of my working life, as a politician I think that there are severe drawbacks to setting up a written constitution.

Race relations legislation is justiciable. It can be extended and interpreted. I do not follow the argument of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) that had there been race relations legislation that affected not only Britain but Europe generally, it would have made a difference to what happened in Notting Hill. It is important to stress that although there is legislation in Britain that outlaws discrimination—and which needs to be strengthened—such legislation does not exist in other European countries. It is essential that it should exist in other European countries.

The hon. Member for Battersea will know that after 1992, there will be substantial freedom of movement for all

[Mr. Darling]

European Community citizens. However, about 15 million people living in Europe are not citizens, although they have the right to live in the country in which they are settled. They will be subject to stops and checks. There is a risk that unless there is protective legislation, those people will be subject to racial harassment of the type that we have seen in France with people from north Africa, in Germany with the Turks and in Brussels only this week, when unfortunate incidents took place. I suspect that they took place partly because of a lack of protective legislation.

Mr. Bowis: I do not suggest that one should not have protective legislation. I said that such constitutional considerations should not be so tightly circumscribed that the courts are unable to be flexible. Courts can often solve problems far more quickly than waiting for laws to be changed.

Mr. Darling: I come back to my earlier point, which is the thrust behind the proposal that we intend to introduce. Such legislation should be fairly tightly drawn because it is important that Parliament's intention is set out clearly in legislation. It will always be open to people to go to court to seek a different interpretation. I should not like there to be a very general statement. A judge could perhaps make the law better. However, as we have seen in employment legislation, judges have taken the view that they cannot see why rights should have been afforded. No matter what Parliament may have thought it was doing, judges would ensure that those rights would be restricted.

Protecting the individual rights of citizens is only one part of constitutional reform. It is essential to pass power from Whitehall to Westminster to the regions and nations of the United Kingdom, not only for political or social reasons, but because it makes sound economic sense. The south-east, until recently, has been choked with high house prices, a consumer spending boom and high labour costs, whereas in the north, the opposite is true. It is absurd that most of the headquarters of our large companies are based in the south-east. That sort of thing does not happen in the United States. There is a feeling that our regions are better known in Tokyo, in Washington and in Brussels than to City financiers, civil servants and Ministers.

The channel tunnel illustrates the absurd position that we have reached. The channel tunnel will effectively stop at Waterloo for the first few years. Britain is out of balance. We need elected assemblies in Scotland and in Wales, but that is not enough. I touch on a point that was made, for all the wrong reasons, by the hon. Member for Govan. I accept that devolution has a substantial degree of merit. However, it will not work if we attempt to devolve power only to some parts of the United Kingdom and not to others. The pattern will be different for obvious reasons.

Let us consider the continental examples. Germany has a full federal system and Spain has a quasi-federal system in which people recognised that some regions of Spain wanted substantial powers and had a clear identity, while other regions wanted less power. Both countries—and others—realise that there is much to be said for the regions fighting alongside the national Government to get their fair share of what Europe has to offer. That is not true of this country, so I believe that it is essential for power to pass from Whitehall to the regions of England.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the reasons for the concentration of power in London is nationalisation, which centralised many small and medium companies in transport, in energy and in steel? It is rather sanctimonious for the hon. Gentleman to make suggestions about the cause.

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman studies the registered offices of all the companies in the country, he will find that a tiny minority are nationalised companies. Many had their headquarters in London, but most private sector companies are also based in London. They will not move out of London. I come from Edinburgh where we have desperately tried to get in some companies. Guinness is the supreme example. We know that there is a reluctance to get people out of London. It is thoroughly undesirable that there is so much concentration in London. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) will know of the problems of congestion and of the throttling of the south-east. In the north of England, people are desperate for some of those jobs. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman could see the common sense of my argument.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Whatever regional assembly and different forms of local government the hon. Gentleman creates, he will have no effect unless he is saying that he will direct companies on where they should set up their head offices and where they should make their investment.

Mr. Darling: That is definitely wrong. We have no intention of directing companies. There are clear examples in Spain and in Germany, where companies coming into the country will study the country and decide which region suits them best. That has worked in Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales constantly tells us that the Welsh Development Agency has been an outstanding success—and it has been. I argue that the north of the country would like exactly the same opportunity. Surely the Minister can see that in European countries that are far more successful than we are, part of the mark of that success is the fact that power has been passed away from the capital city. People have been encouraged to develop and set up businesses, and they have been attracted by the federal or quasi-federal system.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has referred to the success of the Welsh Development Agency. However, he did not argue for a development agency elsewhere in the United Kingdom. He argued for another tier of local government.

Mr. Darling: I am not arguing for that. Regional assemblies would be based on power being passed away from Westminster to the regions. That could apply to many of the functions of the Department of Trade and Industry, of the Department of Transport and of the Department of the Environment. We are not talking about another layer of local government. It is common ground that we must go to single tier local government.

At an early stage, the northern region would set up a development agency for the obvious reason that if Scotland had one, the northern region would otherwise be at a disadvantage. The model that we propose, which was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in a speech in Leeds at the weekend, is a phased approach. We recognise that regions have different demands and want to go at different speeds. They will be given the power to take whatever powers they think are

appropriate. It is high time that the Government realised that the strangulation and the centralisation that their policies have promoted over the past 12 years have ill-served the country.

The hon. Member for Govan will not be surprised to hear that the one thing on which I agree with him—albeit, perhaps, for different reasons—is that the sooner he is out of here the better. I was intrigued that the hon. Gentleman should have engaged in what he called a critique of the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Why did not he come to the Scottish Constitutional Convention? He came for a couple of hours—just long enough for the press to receive the notice that he sent out in advance to say that he intended to walk out, which he did create a photo-opportunity. Why has the hon. Gentleman chosen to come to London rather than Edinburgh to discuss the Scottish Constitutional Convention? Is not it strange that he and the Conservatives are at one on the matter? The Conservatives need the nationalists as much as the nationalists need the Conservatives, and it is ironic that the hon. Gentleman should choose to launch an attack on his Scottish countrymen not in Edinburgh—where he has been invited to speak on many occasions—but in the House of Commons, in London.

Mr. Sillars: I must request the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his allegation that I issued a press statement, went along to the constitutional convention and then staged a walkout. I have never entered the door of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, and the hon. Gentleman should know that full well. I entered into the early negotiations; that was all. I never issued a press statement in advance and I never walked out. I repeat that I have not attended the constitutional convention for a single minute. The hon. Gentleman must be mixing me up with someone else and I would ask him to withdraw.

On the question of where we should debate these matters, I would say that, unfortunately for us, we have to debate in both places—London and Edinburgh. If the hon. Gentleman wants a debate, I shall be happy to have a public debate with him on any platform in Edinburgh or in any other part of Scotland that he and I can arrange.

Mr. Darling: I shall certainly take the hon. Gentleman up on that. We will have that debate in Edinburgh at any time that he chooses. The hon. Gentleman's main complaint seems to hang on a technicality to do with when the Scottish Constitutional Convention started. I thought that the negotiations that the nationalists and all the parties except the Conservatives attended were the start of the convention, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to take issue with that, I can only say that it is a comparatively minor point.

I have already touched briefly on the reform of the second Chamber. Much of the controversy over the War Crimes Bill would have been avoided had we had a properly established, democratically elected second Chamber, part of whose functions was to act as a check and balance on the House of Commons. If that Chamber then chose to block or delay any piece of legislation, there would not be a controversy. The decision would be accepted, as is the case in the United States, Australia and other countries throughout the world that have bicameral systems. It would be a normal part of the democratic process. I believe that a second Chamber is necessary, but it must be democratically elected. The present arrangements are not only out of date; they are clearly intolerable.

Our proposals are part of a comprehensive programme of reform—the rolling programme that we intend to introduce from the beginning of the next Parliament. We believe that our proposals will deliver power to people so that they can decide what course of action they want to adopt and will give people real power, in a way that has never happened before.

We have looked at the examples of countries throughout the world. We are told that this Parliament is the mother of all Parliaments. Given what other Parliaments have done since our Parliament was set up, it appears that this mother of all Parliaments has a great deal to learn from some of its children.

12.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on winning the ballot and on obtaining this debate. We have a first-past-the-post system for private Members' motions and I imagine that, at least today, the hon. Gentleman regards that as a satisfactory method of selection. I am sure that the House will agree that the hon. Gentleman has chosen an absorbing and important series of topics to which it is right that we should direct our attention.

The hon. Gentleman remarked that it was a long time since we had discussed constitutional questions. It may be a long time since we had a debate given over to constitutional questions in general, but many of the subjects covered by the hon. Gentleman and by other hon. Members have been dealt with thoroughly in this Parliament and in earlier Parliaments.

If the scope of constitutional change can be broadened to include official secrets, one can see there have been changes there. We have also had changes in electoral law, with regard to overseas electors. We have had the Single European Act—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) devoted a large part of his speech to our relationships with Europe. Although we may not have had as wide-ranging a debate as this, constitutional questions have certainly not been missing from our agenda.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire has certainly helped us to focus our view. He made an excellent speech, which covered a great deal of ground, and he delivered it with much sincerity. From that encomium, it will be pretty clear to the hon. Gentleman that I fundamentally disagree with much that he said.

The case made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was that our democratic institutions and, at the very least, our arrangements within them are failing people. I do not accept that. The rights and freedom of the individual and their protection lie at the heart of our constitutional practices. Over the years, they have developed pragmatically in response to society's needs and perceived problems and in keeping with the British tradition. Our system continues to allow us to adapt and change where change appears to be necessary. Some of the issues that we have debated and legislated for in this Parliament show that when the Government believe that change is necessary, they bring forward the necessary measures.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Minister believe that the banning of trade union membership at GCHQ was a pragmatic step in the development of the rights of the individual worthy of this Parliament?

Mr. Lloyd: I fear that that was a very necessary step which had to be taken as a result of the constant industrial action at GCHQ which had interfered with our intelligence-gathering capacity. Now that the hon. Gentleman mentions the matter, I recollect that some trade unionists boasted that they could bring the intelligence gathering to a halt. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) is right. That change was made with much regret and if there is a criticism, it is that it was made too late. The change was made in answer to a particular problem that lay at the heart of the security of this country.

Mr. Darling: Why was it necessary for the Government to spend so much taxpayers' money trying to stop "Spycatcher" being published when every Soviet citizen and the rest of the world could read that book? Why did the Government try to stop the British people knowing what the rest of the world already knew?

Mr. Lloyd: Mr. Wright and his publishers were pursued. It was not the intention to deny the British people the knowledge of what that book contained. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said, it was clear very early on that the information was available elsewhere. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made clear at the time, the Government's point was that a member of the security services, contrary to his undertakings, had published a book from which he sought to make profit. We were not protecting the British people from knowledge—most, if not all, of which was entirely inaccurate and which was available as soon as the book had been published.

Although I said that we would avoid change for change's sake, I would not begin to claim that our institutions are perfect. I am certain that they will continue to change as society evolves. With regard to the liberties, opportunities and democratic rights afforded to the citizens of the United Kingdom, our arrangements compare favourably with those elsewhere where arrangements that are attractive to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire are in place.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire made much of the MORI poll conducted for the Rowntree trust, of which he is a director. Like other hon. Members, I found the results interesting. They are undoubtedly a helpful incentive to further debate. However, I do not regard them as a practical or desirable blueprint for reform or believe that they represent clearly what the general public really wants. I say that not because the voters are not capable of knowing their own minds but because involved questions do not conveniently refine down to simple "agree" or "disagree" answers.

Answers on a complex matter such as a Bill of Rights are determined by the question asked. In one case, a Bill of Rights apparently had the support of nearly three quarters of the respondents. However, it is impossible to have a meaningful Bill of Rights without requiring judges to make decisions that are essentially political. I wonder what the answer from those respondents would have been if they had been asked whether they favoured removing some political decisions from the elected House of Commons and giving them to non-elected judges and whether they thought that judges should be brought into party political controversy.

Mr. Tony Banks: A way around that problem is to have a supreme court and to have judges elected. I see no reason why the spread of democracy should not go as far as the bench, as it does in this place as well.

Mr. Lloyd: I agree that the subject is arguable. As soon as one begins to look at it, one realises that it ramifies into a series of other decisions, such as those that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire mentioned. People were not asked whether they wanted an elected High Court. Perhaps they would have agreed with the hon. Gentleman—perhaps they would not—but that was not part of the question that was posed to them.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that we are a signatory to the European convention on human rights and therefore subject to decisions of the European Court of Human Rights already creates a problem which has been identified by the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks)? We have non-elected judges—they are not even non-elected British judges; they are non-elected foreign judges who make political decisions for us.

Mr. Lloyd: We decided on another constitutional change to adhere to that convention and we accepted the final jurisdiction of the court in those questions. It is debatable whether it was right to do so. I believe that it was, and I believe that it provides an added protection. I suspect that my hon. Friend's opinion is entirely different from that of 99 per cent. of the respondents who answered that survey. They did not know that we adhered to that convention and that it was possible finally to take a case to that court.

Mr. Maclennan: On the point about political elements in judicial decisions, what distinction enables the Minister to conclude that it is acceptable for foreign judges to determine matters of human rights in this country, but not British judges? Every constitution that this country prepared for other countries that gained independence within the Commonwealth made provision for Bills of Rights which apparently have been acceptable in those countries and have not been repealed. Why does the Minister think that it was right for this country to do to others what it was not prepared to do here?

Mr. Lloyd: The experience of many countries to which we have given independence has shown that Bills of Rights are not worth the paper that they are written on. No doubt, the reason we sought to give them was that countries without our traditions and our unwritten constitution needed something. From experience I believe that it was second best. Other countries do things in their own ways and according to their own traditions. The hon. Gentleman's point would be good if Bills of Rights had acted to any benefit to those countries to which we gave independence. On the whole, they did not, and the hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that.

In that MORI poll, 49 per cent. of people favoured compulsory voting, as compared with 42 per cent. against —not a measure that would extend freedom, or be very practical, either, as the determined abstainer could always spoil his paper. Did the respondents want the electoral

registration officer to check each paper to see that it was correctly filled in and to prosecute if it was not? I am sure that they did not, but they were not asked to think the matter through. That is another reason why I regard the poll with great interest but am sceptical about whether it represents the thought-through conclusions of the people who were questioned.

Most people sensibly believe that the right to vote is precious and should be used, so, when faced with an opinion pollster and without opportunity for further reflection, they agree that voting should be made compulsory. I am quite certain that there is a similar tendency behind the thinking of the 50 per cent. of respondents favouring proportional representation. I imagine that the question emphasised that PR gave a fairer representation of parties in the House according to votes cast. Not surprisingly, it secured wide consent. The only puzzle is that, put like that, more than 50 per cent. did not agree. Again, I imagine that the poll results would have been very different if respondents had been asked whether they were in favour of changing to a voting system that weakened or terminated the personal connection of a Member of Parliament with his constituency.

The respondents were not asked whether they were in favour of a system that put the choice of candidate into the hands of party managers who controlled the lists and gave a far greater chance that a small party with a minor share of the votes would exercise a decisive influence on the make-up of the Government.

All the features that I have mentioned are characteristic of proportional representation. If those features had been implied or stated in the question, I am certain that the respondents would have come to different conclusions.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister is being patronising, perhaps insulting, about the intelligence of those who responded to that MORI poll. We know all about the way in which questions can be framed. First, the Minister could make a better case than simply to disparage the poll and, therefore, those who participated in it. Surely he accepts that it demonstrates dissatisfaction among the public with present institutions.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman described only one form of proportional representation. There are many forms of PR. The hon. Gentleman should deal with whether we want a system that enables a Government to say that they speak with 50 per cent. plus of the vote. I believe that we do and that that is what the British people want.

Mr. Lloyd: There are many forms of proportional representation, not all of which terminate the connection with the constituency. That is why I added that it may weaken the connection. However, there is no form of PR that leaves the connection as direct, complete and unarguable as the single-Member constituencies which we have at present.

I also made it clear that I found the results of the poll interesting. One always looks behind public opinion polls to find out what is in the minds of those who reply to them. I do not disparage the electors. I believe that their hearts are in the right place. They want rights to be protected and they want people to vote in elections. They want as much information as possible to be available to them. I agree with all those aspirations. But, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) will know, unless one is familiar with a complex subject, it is difficult to answer detailed questions about what one wants.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West will have answered public opinion polls. A questionnaire may be sent to us in the House about aspects of policy. We have time to consider those aspects of policy. One cannot simply fill in the answer, as pollsters require people to do on the spot. The problem with the surveys in which we are asked to answer deceptively simple questions—one knows that they are deceptively simple—is that it takes Members of Parliament a long time to respond to them. That is why many of us have decided that it is not possible to reply to all the surveys that are sent to us.

I do not imply any disrespect to the electors. I simply seek to look behind what was in their minds when they answered the questions.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend admitted that it was not necessary to lose the link with the constituency under PR systems. The most obvious example of where the link is not lost is the additional member system which exists in Germany where one member is elected for the constituency and then an additional member is added. Surely the problem with that system is that it is the one that enhances most securely the power of the party list.

Mr. Lloyd: That is right. It weakens the link because the selection of the member is not made in the constituency, as it is in our system. There is no system of PR that in one way or another does not weaken the connection.

Mr. Wallace: Although the Minister subsequently accepted that there were various forms of proportional representation, he seemed to be obsessed, as was the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), with the party list system. A list system has never been advocated by anyone in my party. Does the Minister accept that if a multi-Member constituency system were adopted voters would have a choice between a Bruges group Conservative, a No Turning Back group Conservative and so on, to take the Conservative party as an example? Such a system would give more power to the voters to make a choice even between candidates from the same party. At present, voters can choose only the candidate whom the management committee or the local party decides to select.

Mr. Lloyd: There are all sorts of PR systems. They do not all destroy the connection with the constituency, but they all weaken it, including the one that the hon. Gentleman just mentioned. A multi-Member constituency must be large, so it is difficult to keep the personal connection that most hon. Members like to keep and, indeed, enjoy keeping with their constituency. When there are several Members, instead of one Member, responsible across the board to people from all parties and none, constituents tend to go to the Member whom they think will be most favourably disposed to them or to one who specialises in a particular interest. The connection is weakened. I am not saying that on that basis these alternatives have no merit and could not possibly work. I am saying that they are far more complicated and that the arguments against them are stronger than they would have been in the questions in the survey.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West reminded me that he intervened in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). The hon.

[Mr. Lloyd]

Gentleman said that everything depends on party anyway and that if my right hon. Friend resigned and then stood under another flag, even my redoubtable right hon. Friend might not be re-elected. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman meant it that way, but that has nothing to do with any constitutional shortcoming—it is the decision of the electorate. By and large, they vote according to party. There is every choice under our system to vote for an individual, but, for the most part, the electorate do not choose to do so, and that is their free decision.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister spoke of the free decision of the electorate, but electors do not have an alternative. One could draw his conclusion, but, equally, as electors do not have an alternative, one could conclude, that they do not have freedom. The party system is a fact of life. I am not complaining about it. When the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) said that an individual Member stood as a buttress against the overweening party, I merely pointed out that that did not happen. All of us are here not because of our wit, great wisdom, good looks and excellent speeches, but because we all wore certain party labels at the general election.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but that is not the result of constitutional rules imposed on electors; it is because of the choice that they make. If too few independent candidates stand, it is because they know perfectly well that the electorate will not choose them.

The hon. Gentleman argued that under our system Back-Bench Members have no influence whatever on behalf of their constituents. I disagree. If we had a list system, the incentive and opportunity for Members to bring pressure on behalf of their constituents would evaporate almost entirely. As I was a Whip for four years, I know that a single-Member constituency means that Members on both sides of the House return on Monday morning after a weekend in their constituency with clear ideas of what their constituents want or do not want, which are impressed extremely hard on the party with much effect. The whole exercise is a balance between particular pressures from constituencies and the demands of national government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: During that exchange, the issue of independent candidates standing for election was raised. They will stand if there is sufficiently strong local feeling. For example, only two weeks ago, feelings in Liverpool were so strong that candidates came forward to oppose the overweening might of the Labour party, and were elected.

Mr. Lloyd: Perhaps I inadvertently misled the House and my hon. Friend when I said that independent candidates rarely came forward. They do and they call themselves Liberals, Social and Liberal Democrats, Alliance or whatever.

I am sure that the MORI survey accurately reflects the public's real and admirable concern to ensure that personal freedom is upheld, that people use their vote and that the electoral system is sensitive to their opinions and reflects them.

Mr. Darling: The Minister is making heavy weather of his criticism of the MORI poll. He has acknowledged that the poll expressed the public's concern, so will he explain why the Government will not introduce a freedom of information Bill and why they will not strengthen the data protection legislation?

Mr. Lloyd The Government believe that a freedom of information Bill would not be helpful to the public, just as it is not helpful in most countries with similar legislation——

Mr. Darling: Including the United States?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, including the United States. It is more important to follow the Government's course of providing more meaningful information about the basis on which policy decisions are taken so that the public and those interested can make their own judgment. The Select Committee is part and parcel of that exercise. A freedom of information Bill would not in itself be helpful. It would be more helpful if Governments provided the information and the arguments that have led them and have weighed with them when arriving at conclusions. It is also necessary —it is difficult to put this into legislation—in government and other areas for conversations to take place in reasonable privacy. We have removed the bar in the Official Secrets Act 1911 that prevented information becoming available except in special circumstances when, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central would agree, that information needs to be safeguarded. In the past decade, there has been a great change and I hope that we go further in making plain to the public the basis for our decisions.

Mr. Darling: Does not the Minister think that it is absurd that in many cases information about the British Government's actions is obtained from the United States? The United States has to declare some of its dealings with our Government and the information can be freely obtained under its Freedom of Information Act. We then receive that information by reading American newspapers.

Does the Minister accept that there is a distinction between matters of genuine national security and the political advice that Ministers receive? No one would suggest that information on national security should be made commonly available, but there is a case for enabling citizens to discover information on matters such as health and safety. I do not understand why the Government will not do that and why they are so obsessed with secrecy and withholding information. That disease has affected many Governments, but this one seems worse than many of their predecessors.

Mr. Lloyd: Certain information about this country has become available in the United States, but it should not have done so. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are matters which could reasonably be made public. It is not a matter on which I have detailed knowledge, but I recollect that some of the cases in recent years have related to the period when the Labour party was in office.

There is a difference between not passing declamatory laws and making germane information available so that decisions can be maturely and sensibly judged by not only the newspapers and television but the public at large. I do not wholly disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but I think that the right approach should be an administrative rather than a legislative one.

I conclude, following the remarks of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, that our current voting system has decisive merit, which the Liberal party

historically appreciated until it gave up hope of winning power again through it, after allowing the Labour party to take over the bulk of the support that it used to enjoy in the country.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning's dramatic news that inflation has fallen by 1·8 points to 6·4 per cent. is of great national importance and will cause great relief and excitement to the public. Is it——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. What is the point of order?

Mr. Taylor: Would it be in order for us to request that a Treasury Minister comes to the Dispatch Box to explain to the country how such a dramatic improvement has been achieved and to affirm that the Government will continue their policy——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is more genuine than the last one.

Mr. King: That is for you to decide, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I urge you to use your channels of communication and to consider whether it would be appropriate, after the experiences of the electors of Monmouth last night, when they were "trash-krieged" by the Labour party in connection with a document—*[Interruption.]*—that was mischieviously inaccurate——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is about as bogus as the last point of order.

Mr. King: I was about to ask if you were aware. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, subsequent to that leaflet being issued, the Leader of the Opposition confirmed his support for the leaflet. Have you heard whether the Leader of the Opposition wishes to make a statement to the House——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that those are not matters for me.

Mr. Riddick: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you advise me how we can make the Leader of the Opposition accountable to the House of Commons when he has agreed with lies that have been made outside the House? Are you able to demand that he comes before us——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I fear that we are moving into very dangerous territory. Perhaps we had better get back to the debate.

Mr. Darling: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were not in the Chair when exactly the same thing happened earlier this morning, when a systematic attempt was made to spread a smear in the Chamber—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What is the hon. Member's point of order for me?

Mr. Darling: I urge you to impress on hon. Gentlemen that we are engaged in an important debate that should not be disrupted by a party which is clearly stung by the defeat that it suffered last night. Conservative Members have no business spreading smears——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I agree with the hon. Member that we should get back to the debate.

Mr. Lloyd: They may not have been points of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that you will agree that the news about falling inflation is welcome and should be regarded as such by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I was speaking about the link between the constituency and the individual hon. Member in single-Member constituencies. I believe that most electors would be loath to lose that link. They place great value on it and, if asked, would say so.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to the Minister for warmly welcoming the news on inflation. Would he equally welcome an opportunity for the appropriate Opposition correction to be made—*[Interruption.]*—because the proposal to create NHS trust hospitals, remaining within the NHS framework, is designed to make managements more efficient? Does the Minister agree that that should be clearly stated?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I trust that we can now return to the motion that is before the House.

Mr. Lloyd: The electors, local elections, constituencies, by-elections and hon. Members are all sensitive to public mood, and it is no pleasure for me to acknowledge that immediately after the by-election at Monmouth. But the Labour victor believes that he won mainly because of concerns about the NHS reforms. That is despite the fact that what he and the Labour party said about those reforms and intentions are untrue and will be shown to be so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Minister appreciates that if I allow him to proceed we are likely to end up engaging in a debate on the national health service, and I will not allow that.

Mr. Lloyd: I have no intention of departing from the rules, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you allow me to continue, I am sure that you will realise that what I am saying is germane to the points that I am trying to answer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister will recognise that, whatever doors he opens, I shall find it difficult to prevent other hon. Members from going through them and following in his footsteps. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

Mr. Lloyd: I will certainly bear it in mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I hope that, when I have made my point, you will acknowledge that it was entirely in order.

It is interesting to note that the candidate for the party represented by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire did not claim that the electors felt that the contest was being conducted according to a system that prevented them from registering an effective vote. The claim has been that the argument was all about a particular piece of Government policy—or several pieces of Government policy. If the candidate did indeed say that constitutional issues were dominant, a hunger for constitutional change certainly did not seem to be what moved the electors of Monmouth. If that was what they

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felt, the Liberal Democrats could have articulated their feelings and, presumably, won the seat. However, different issues influenced the voters.

The great advantage of our system, apart from the strong constituency link that it secures—a link that I am sure the public do not wish to sever—is that, to succeed, a party must appeal to, and win over, the centre ground. Our system exacts a heavy price from the parties that lose, as Labour has so signally done over the past decade.

The reason why the Liberal Democrats have come nowhere near holding office for 50 years has never been the electoral system. The reason is that, having been displaced by Labour a couple of generations ago—under, it should be noted, the first-past-the-post system—and despite various name changes since then, the Liberal Democrats have never been able to convince enough Labour or Conservative supporters that they would form a better Government than their parties would.

Mr. Wallace: I am sorry to disrupt the Minister's carefully prepared attack on my party. He seems, however, to be using the Monmouth by-election result to suggest that constitutional reform is not uppermost in the voters' minds because the Liberal Democrats did not win. Why, then, do not the Government respond immediately with a full package of constitutional measures? My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) won that by-election with an overwhelming swing of support towards the Liberal Democrats. Constitutional matters were debated at that by-election, and, indeed, the issue of the Scottish Parliament was mentioned at one point.

If the Minister is going to persist in his argument—admittedly, not a very good argument—why should not the Government pay attention to constitutional matters, given the resounding victories for the Liberal Democrats at Eastbourne and Ribble Valley?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not believe that the by-elections were won and lost on those issues. I have never believed that. They were won and lost on entirely different issues, regardless of whether those issues were presented honestly.

I am trying to respond to what was said by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who believes that people's minds are much exercised by constitutional questions and that they feel that our constitutional arrangements are inadequate and damaging and want them to be changed in a number of ways. I dispute that. I dispute the strength of feeling and also the nature of the change that the hon. Gentleman says the people want—when they want any change at all.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The motion calls for "extensive modernisation" of our constitutional provisions. Does my hon. Friend agree that a travesty of our constitution is created when we have no opportunity to question the Leader of the Opposition when he supports election pamphlets that have produced lies? Should there not be constitutional modernisation to introduce such an opportunity?

Mr. Lloyd: The House can engineer what opportunities it wishes to question and raise points with either Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen or the Government.

Mr. Darling: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the good things about the constitution—especially the rules and procedures of the House—is that we are encouraged not to use intemperate language, and in particular not to make allegations concerning impropriety on the part of any hon. Member? Does he think that it would be a good idea if both he and all his right hon. and hon. Friends—in particular, the members of the Cabinet—were to refrain from making allegations, the sole purpose of which is to smear an hon. Member who is soon to join us? Would not it be far better if they abandoned their intemperate language, which would not be tolerated in any school classroom, let alone around the Cabinet table?

Mr. Lloyd: If the Opposition would agree to a self-denying ordinance, I am sure that the Government would wish to join in. It helps the business of the House if points and issues are discussed sensibly. However, as both the hon. Gentleman and I know, it is the nature of this place that feelings sometimes run high and that strong feelings are expressed.

Mr. Roger King: As my hon. Friend just pointed out, the motion calls for

"extensive modernisation of the United Kingdom's democratic institutions and constitutional provisions."

After a candidate has been elected, the normal process is for his or her expenses to go forward for examination. That is right and proper. Does my hon. Friend believe that it would be a worthwhile innovation if we subjected election material to an audit, so that the kind of trash that I am holding in my hands, which was given to the people of Monmouth, can be examined, as a result of which the candidate would be disqualified?

Mr. Lloyd: I dare say that the election literature will be looked at both inside and outside the House and discussed and debated for some time to come.

The most interesting aspect of the speech of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was the absence of new ideas, or the forceful advocacy of any particular idea among the old ones which he mentioned. He did not even especially press the case for regional government. However, I know what he was doing—he was laying out a series of issues. Therefore, I am not surprised that that issue was not pressed, even though it was taken up by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. My experience suggests that the public mood is moving away from a superfluity of regional and local bodies towards reducing them and relying on single authorities that are as near as possible to the people whom they serve—the very antithesis of regional authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends to take soundings on that issue so that we can return to the shape of local government that people would like. My right hon. Friend has also said that the shape may vary in different parts of the country, according to the predominant feeling in and the needs of those areas.

The point about the lack of a sharp focus on particular reforms that the hon. Gentleman would want a future Liberal Government to pursue was taken up in the commonsense speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North. He told me that he had a constituency engagement at lunchtime that would require him to be elsewhere, but he praised the continuing link between a Member of Parliament and his constituents and urged us to make no change to our constitution, or anything else unless there is a very good and considered reason for it. He

said that ill-considered reforms, some of which he listed, can be extremely damaging. That must be right. He underlined the value of single-Member constituencies. I am sure that most hon. Members agree with him about that; so, I believe, do most members of the public.

I enjoyed the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). As usual, it was wide ranging, humorous and idiosyncratic. The right hon. Gentleman is coming to, so I shall repeat what I just said. I enjoyed his speech, which was witty and wide ranging. I wish that I could make mine with similar humour, and so does the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. I am concerned about two points that the right hon. Gentleman made. He was worried about the House of Lords holding up the democratic will of the people. Since the Parliament Act 1911, the other place cannot resist the will of the elected Chamber, as the War Crimes Bill showed; it can merely delay. If the second Chamber were elected, it would, no doubt, resist being overruled and it is likely that constitutional conflict and delay would follow.

Mr. Benn: There are many arguments about the Lords. When I was a member of Cabinet in the minority Government, I remember the Leader of the House of Lords saying, "We cannot try that; we will not get it through the Lords and it will mean another passage through the Commons." Measures are killed before birth if it is thought that the Lords will be difficult. That is a historical fact that the Minister must not deny. Statutory instruments cannot be considered if the Lords refuses to accept an instrument that requires an affirmative resolution.

The argument about patronage is powerful. A young Member comes to the House with radical ideas—I have seen this many times—but discovers within 24 hours that to be made a Minister he must please the Prime Minister. When he gets to my age, if he wants a pension for life and a seat in Parliament, he must please the Prime Minister. The power of the Prime Minister—all Prime Ministers have done it; there is no difference between the last one and anyone under whom I served—to put people in Parliament for life is enormous. Jim Callaghan threatened to resign the leadership of the Labour party on the night of 2 April 1979 if we insisted on putting the proposal to abolish the House of Lords in our manifesto. Please do not think that it is not significant; it is very significant.

Mr. Lloyd: I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's revelations about the arguments and considerations that moved a Labour Cabinet. I cannot comment on that—certainly not with his authority. In the debates and arguments in government, no one worries whether, one day, they might end up in the House of Lords. That is a fanciful suggestion. It might have been true of Governments in which the right hon. Gentleman served, but it is not of the one in which I play a small role.

In a remarkable passage of constitutional misinformation, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield asserted that as we are all merely subjects, we do not have any rights. We are also British citizens—a term that is used in the British Nationality Act 1981. The right hon. Gentleman misses the point. Rights and freedoms are inherent in being part of our society. It is not a matter of rights having to be conferred by some legislative instruments: such rights exist, except where they have been removed or circumscribed by decisions of Parliament after debate and voting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) made a sensible and realistic speech—at least it started that way. I apologise for missing most of it, but I had to leave the Chamber on urgent departmental business.

I heard the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). Not surprisingly, he devoted his arguments to Scottish independence and devolution. He generously gave way twice to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). Therefore, I shall not deal with the points that were made in that exchange.

A significant fact that has been mentioned by several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, is that at the last general election 85 per cent. of the votes cast were for parties committed to maintaining the Union. There was no sign that anything other than a small minority wanted independence. The referendum on devolution later produced a low turnout, suggesting that most Scottish electors had no strong feelings about the matter and that only a minority was in favour.

Far from ignoring Scottish feelings and interests—an idea which is sedulously developed north of the border—the Government were determined to avoid imposing on Scotland, at considerable expense to the Scottish people, yet another tier of government, especially a tier with tax-levying powers. If it were not so armed, what would be the point of it?

The Government are fully committed to the Union which they believe brings great benefits to all the people of the United Kingdom—the Scots, the Welsh, the English and the Northern Irish. We value and admire the enormous contribution that Scotland makes to the Union and we respect and take pride in the separate national identity of Scotland. However, we believe that we should not invent yet another tier of local government, which the hon. Member for Govan in effect said would inevitably lead to conflict, if not in Brussels, which he particularly mentioned, then at home. We believe that we should maintain the present arrangements—Scottish Ministers working through the Scottish Office, and the maintenance and development of separate Scottish legislation and a separate legal system.

I listened carefully to the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick). I do not endorse all that he said. As I hope that I have made clear, the overwhelming feeling in the Government is that the Union, as it is, is a source of strength to Scotland and to the rest of the United Kingdom. I agree with his prediction of the unsatisfactory experience that would result if a devolved assembly became a reality.

I also listened with interest to the many points made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. He underestimated the Government's success with their various economic development bodies in attracting investment from abroad—not least that of Japanese car firms—to the Provinces. We are especially successful when compared with the rest of Europe which has the regional government that the hon. Gentleman applauds. Our success has been greater without that extra tier of local government.

I was interested in and especially struck by the fact that the hon. Gentleman said that, although the Labour party would have no Bill of Rights because that would be

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impracticable, it would introduce other rights which would be justiciable. I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman had in mind, and I do not think that he was clear about it. However, I look forward to hearing the outcome of his discussions with his hon. Friends and to hearing how they will solve the conflict that was reflected in his speech.

Other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall sit down. I look forward to hearing what they have to say. Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire on introducing this welcome debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can see six hon. Members trying to catch my eye. We have 67 minutes of debating time left, so the arithmetic is obvious.

1.23 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I will take your hint, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although it is unfortunate that today, which is primarily for Back-Bench Members, so much time has been lost through too-lengthy speeches from the Front Benches, if the Minister will forgive me for saying so.

I want to take up some of the Minister's points. He gave the impression at one stage that he regarded the present constitution of the United Kingdom as close to perfection and that he was unable to see any failings in it. I represent a constituency in Northern Ireland and I found those views difficult to accept. How can the Minister square his views with the almost total absence of any form of representative and democratic government in Northern Ireland? In part of the United Kingdom, the electorate are unable to affect any decisions that are taken with regard to them. One of the Minister's colleagues said to the people of Northern Ireland in a television interview the day before an election that it did not make any difference how they voted because it would not make any difference. The tragedy is that the comment was true.

The Minister referred to the advisability of Select Committees. I hope that he will look at motion No. 39 on the Order Paper today, which is a proposal for a Select Committee on Northern Ireland, which I hope that he will consequently endorse.

I want to develop the Northern Ireland aspect now and then to turn to other matters. There was a long discussion about the merits and demerits of proportional representation. I find it rather strange that people discuss the issue without considering the experience of proportional representation in Northern Ireland. I believe that the single transferable vote system which has been imposed upon us is just about the worst form of proportional representation. No one seems to look too closely at that experience. Instead, standard comments are trotted out about the effect of proportional representation which I should dearly love to take up at greater length. In view of the time, it would not be right to do so now, but we may have the opportunity to discuss the issue on another occasion.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is unfortunately no longer present. In his interesting and entertaining speech, he gave a survey of various constitutional reforms and changes. It was interesting and possibly characteristic that he omitted from his catalogue the most important of a series of constitutional changes which present the foundation of the modern British constitution and of the modern British state. I refer to the Glorious Revolution. It seemed to pass by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield although—and the right hon. Gentleman referred to this on another occasion—Revolution hall is located in his constituency. It is the place from which the letter inviting the successful Dutch invasion was sent.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) is not here. I know that he had to leave to catch an aeroplane back to Scotland. I had hoped to leave here over an hour ago to catch an aeroplane. The hon. Member for Govan stated his preference for a form of independence for Scotland. I am sorry that he is not here now, because I wanted to ask him a significant question. If there should ever be independence for Scotland, which is not impossible, what would be the best course for us in Ulster? Should we stay with England or go with Scotland? We should have to make such a choice, and it would not be an easy choice. Although our legal history and constitutional forms may seem to suggest a closer link with England, in social, cultural and economic matters, there is a far closer identity between Ulster and Scotland. The hon. Member for Govan referred to an important feature of Scottish cultural life which he felt determined the nature of Scottish society. He referred to poetry, of which Robert Burns was the chief exemplar. Exactly the same forms existed in Ulster even before Burns, as they did in Scotland.

The Scottish National party leaves out the social, cultural and economic links throughout the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman may desire a greater degree of self-government for Scotland, but I am sure that the essential connection between the peoples of the United Kingdom will be the determining factor.

Devolution is important and desirable. We regard with interest the contrast between the Government's position on Scotland and their position on Northern Ireland. They oppose devolution for Scotland, for the good reason, they argue, that devolution in respect of one part of the United Kingdom is potentially divisive and might break up the Union. Then we wonder why on earth they are in favour of devolution for Northern Ireland. The Government's argument that devolution may lead to a break-up is, in theory, correct, although I would point out that the actual experience of devolution in Northern Ireland over a 50-year period was very different. Devolution strengthened the Union, and the Union has been under greater threat since it ended.

That points to a fact that we should bear in mind in debates such as these: in the end, it is not the constitutional form that is important. What is important is the structure of society and the desires of people—the way in which they want to structure and organise their lives. Constitutional form may have some significance in affecting that, but it will not determine what happens or what people want.

Questions about devolution are not new. We have discussed the matter many times before. I have referred to the various home rule Bills from 1886 onwards. Between 1917 and 1920 we had serious debates in this place on PR and on federalism. At one point, the House seemed close to adopting a form of federalism, and since then we have had Kilbrandon and the pressure for devolution in Scotland and Wales. I do not think that devolution will go away. We shall come back to it and, in some respects, the present time may be particularly favourable.

The Government's period in office has been characterised by the steady centralisation of power in London and in the House, and the consequent diminution of the role of local government. Local government has steadily been stripped of more and more of its powers—most spectacularly a few weeks ago, when its revenue base was reduced to 14 or 15 per cent. That is not a good way of running a country. It is not a good system to concentrate everything here. It causes enormous problems by overloading hon. Members and this House and it makes the House more subservient to the Government because it renders the needs of the Government much greater.

It would be beneficial to the House, and would improve the quality of our representative democracy here and in the regions, if responsibilities were taken out of the purview of the House and moved to institutions elsewhere. Decentralisation may give us the opportunity to do that. The Minister has referred to the trend in favour of a single tier of local government. I think that that is a good idea. We should have a single tier and then—as the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman suggested—place on top of that a series of regional administrations, which would be more than simply local authorities. The opportunity is there, and the reaction to the changes in local government point in that direction, as do developments in Europe.

As has been pointed out, we are the largest country in the European Community that does not have an effective system of regional administration, and that already causes considerable problems in the operation of European regional policy. In applying regional policy, the Commission, and, to some extent, its Council of Ministers, have to try to discover the views of the region concerned. In Bavaria there are no problems; one simply goes to the Länd administration, which will give its views of the needs and desires of the Bavarian people. The Länd will give a Bavarian view, not a German Government view.

In the United Kingdom, it is a different matter. Officials may go to Cardiff or Edinburgh to research some aspect of regional policy for Wales or Scotland. But the Welsh and Scottish Offices do not give a distinctive Welsh or Scottish view; they give a British Government view. There is not the opportunity for regional views to form in the United Kingdom because of the concentration of power in this place. That is causing considerable difficulties for the development of the application of regional policy and is leading to an absurd situation.

Civil servants and presumably Ministers are not formulating proposals in respect of which regional grants might be available because they know that that would not be to their advantage, given the way in which the Treasury operates the system. I identified a development in my constituency to civil servants as a candidate for European regional grants, but I was told that there was no point applying for such grants and that the money would have to come from another source.

The development of regional authorities within Europe and Europe's effect on their development is significant. We will have to take account of such developments if European enterprise develops along current lines. Although we cannot predict the future in that respect, European developments are yet another reason for considering regional administration in this country.

I have referred to devolution, but the various regions of Britain should not be saddled with the kind of administration provided in the Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1973. Presumably the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is trying to foist a similar assembly on us. I doubt whether that form of devolution is worth while, particularly because of the tremendous limits placed on the authority of the kind of assembly proposed in the Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1973. Hon. Members should consider that Act as an object lesson in things to avoid.

Regional administration will have no value unless it has its own legitimacy, rights and resources. The resources are important. People are worried that if we have another body, there will be an additional tax. There cannot be effective regional administration without resource powers. A local income tax is attractive and it will be worth considering that as one source of funding. However, there should be a mixture of resources. There tends to be a variety of sources from which funds are raised in those countries that have extensive federal or regional administrations.

The powers of a regional administration, whether they be legislative or simply administrative, are less important than the creation of such an administration. The details of the powers are less important, because such an administration would take some of the burden off this place. Regional administration would also give back to the regions their identity.

It can be argued that some English cities have suffered in terms of their development because of the absence of regional administation. There is a tendency to undervalue local government. That is strange and it was not always the case. In the latter part of the 19th century Joseph Chamberlain used Birmingham as a base and that point is referred to in the current edition of *The House Magazine*. Regional administration in England would benefit certain cities which would become regional centres. It would also benefit other parts of the United Kingdom.

Such a change would be ineffective and unsuccessful unless there were consequential effects on this place. The creation of regional administration should result in a diminution of the powers and responsibilities of this House. That is possibly why such an administration has not been created so far. We are up against the myth of parliamentary sovereignty and the desire to concentrate powers on this place.

The hon. Member for Govan pointed out that the view that is often expressed in the House about the extent of parliamentary sovereignty is distinctively English and does not correspond with the constitutional law of Scotland. Indeed, it does not survive any sensible, intelligent study of how this Parliament, which dates from only 1800, came into existence. Hon. Members should consider that point further. If they do so, they should not pay any attention, I am sorry to say, to the history of Parliament contained in "Dod's"—it is empirical. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that this Parliament came into existence in 1800 only by virtue of the decision of two other Parliaments which then ceased to exist—the Parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland. The Parliament of Great Britain dates from only 1707. People seem to insist, and even the decor in the House seems to assume that the Parliament of England is still in existence. It is not. It has not existed for more than 200 years. Of course it would be open to the Queen, who has the royal prerogative, to assemble it again if people still wished, but that is another matter entirely.

We need to get rid of or at least to put on a more sensible basis the way in which our constitution works.

[Mr. David Trimble]

The matters to which the right hon. Member for Chesterfield referred with regard to the powers of the crown were a little exaggerated when he pointed out prerogative powers. It is significant that the ghost of the absolute monarch still exists to a certain extent within the House, but it is located on the Government Front Bench. That is where we should concentrate our attention. It would be a good thing to draw up a written constitution for the United Kingdom. Of course it could include provisions such as a Bill of Rights which, again, is another matter entirely.

The absence of regional administrations and of a written constitution and the fact that we have only the one legislature tend to reinforce the belief that the United Kingdom is a unitary state. It is not. The United Kingdom is a multinational state. It divides the original homeland of at least half a dozen distinct nationalities or ethnic groups. Other groups have been added as a result of later immigration.

As I said, the constitution should reflect the reality in the state and the reality of the social structures that exist within a particular country. Our unwritten constitution does not. It overlaps those realities. Until perhaps a generation or two ago there had been an understanding within the governing class of the reality—the multi-national state and the fact that there is a series of different tendencies within the country. Perhaps that reflects the time when a significant number of the governing class came from Scotland, Wales and Ulster.

We now have a system that is overdominated by people from southern England who assume that the appearance of the unitary state reflects the reality. Of course, the reality is otherwise. In a way, that explains why the party of the present Government is so unpopular in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and, indeed, to a certain extent in northern England as well. The Government do not appreciate the social reality that the constitution underlies. The constitution should reflect reality, whereas the present constitution distorts it.

1.42 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I, too, think that we are indebted to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for moving this important motion. I was interested to see that it was inspired by a MORI poll. To the extent that this debate may have cast some more light on the issues referred to in that poll and to the extent that people may be better informed if they listen to the debate—indeed, hon. Members may be better informed having listened to each other—the hon. Gentleman will have done us all a service. However, his enthusiasm for some of the reforms proposed in the MORI poll are misplaced, and I shall say briefly why.

The hon. Gentleman advocates a Bill of Rights. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) talked about a written constitution. That would be profoundly mistaken. If we look at the history of democracy in this country, we see that after the supremacy of Parliament, which was established by Cromwell, we have made an enormous transition from what amounted to a feudal monarchy to a modern democracy with universal suffrage and that we have gone through huge social and economic changes without wars or civil commotion of any significant degree. We have made those transitions relatively smoothly because we do not have a written constitution and we have the flexibility that is inherent in our present system. In other countries where that flexibility does not prevail, there has been much greater upheaval as a result of such social changes. In many cases, that may stem from the fact that the country has a written constitution which is relatively inflexible.

Where our country is subject to some form of written constitution, problems have arisen, which were mentioned in the debate. We are signatories to the European convention on human rights, which is written. It sets out in a detailed treaty certain rights for individuals who live in the countries that are signatories to it. The problem is that decisions that are often of a political nature are taken by judges. In the case of human rights, the judges are not resident in the United Kingdom. Their decisions may not reflect the customs, practices and wishes of people in the United Kingdom. That is profoundly unsatisfactory.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled that corporal punishment was against the convention. Whether or not the House of Commons wished to restore corporal punishment, it could not do so because of the decision of three foreign judges who are not accountable to the British public.

The court has also said that if we voted to restore capital punishment—to which I am opposed—it would consider that it had a right to rule on the matter. If we established a written constitution we would tie ourselves unnecessarily and undesirably to a written, inflexible framework which could override the democratic wishes of our citizens.

Several hon. Members touched on freedom of information and suggested that we should have a freedom of information Act. Indeed, I believe that that is Labour party policy. But it should consider what would be involved in such an Act. Where such an Act exists, in America for example, it brings with it a politicisation of the civil service. The reason for that is obvious if one thinks about it.

If a Minister in a British Department is considering a change in the law or some innovation, he can ask his civil servants to consider the possible results of a series of actions that he might take. The civil servant can come back and tell the Minister that if he takes one action it will be a disaster for one set of reasons and if he takes another it will be a disaster for another range of reasons. In privacy and confidence with his civil servants, the Minister can consider those actions and rule them out.

If we had a freedom of information Act, as the Opposition suggest, the position would be different. All the options considered by civil servants under the principle of confidentiality would become public knowledge. Ministers would not want to have egg on their faces so they would not be innovative. The only alternative is a system whereby the whole civil service is politicised and changes with the Administration. In the United States, when the President changes, the Administration changes with him. That is highly undesirable. One of the strengths of the British political system is that our civil service is apolitical. It is prepared and confident to serve successive Administrations impartially. The day that we throw that away, we shall live to regret it.

I shall not deal at length with devolution because time is pressing and I know that other hon. Members wish to

speak. As an English Member, I have no objection to Members from other parts of the United Kingdom coming here and participating in our debates, although it is beyond doubt that other parts of the United Kingdom are over-represented. In many cases, citizens from other parts of the United Kingdom receive a much greater proportion of the gross national product than English citizens. But that is our constitution. We are a union and Members from other parts of the United Kingdom have a right to be here. However, I object when those self-same Members kick up a stink if English Members choose to speak on matters affecting their part of the United Kingdom. We are a united kingdom and we should always be able to express a view on anything pertaining to any part of it. There must be parity between us on that.

There is an idea that somehow proportional representation would solve many ills and more accurately reflect the view of the general public. I do not believe it for one moment. Under the present system the general public have become sophisticated. They are accustomed to voting tactically. As a result, the party that is deemed likely to come second has its vote over-emphasised. Those living in a safe Labour constituency who want to get rid of a Labour Member are more likely to vote for the party that will come second than for any other candidate, and those living in a safe Conservative constituency who wish to get rid of a Conservative Member are most likely to vote for the party that will come second, which in most cases happens to be the Liberal Democratic party. Our present system exaggerates the level of real support that it would have if we had a proportional system. Hon. Gentlemen should ponder that before they continue to advocate such a system.

The real problem of PR is that it would give undue influence to minority parties. Hon. Members have referred to what happens elsewhere. For example, in West Germany one party held the balance of power almost since the war. It demanded as a price for its support for whichever party won the majority the right to have the foreign ministry and to dictate what happened in German foreign affairs. That is not desirable. It has inhibited all sorts of developments. Its influence on agricultural matters has been a major reason why we have been unable to reform the common agricultural policy decently. In all those ways minority parties would have far too much influence.

It is no use saying that there would be a threshold. In Denmark there was a 5 per cent. threshhold, yet the extraordinary Progress party was elected with 16 per cent. on policies to abolish income tax and Danish membership of NATO, and all sorts of other such matters. It was run by a tax lawyer for self-promotion and he ended up in gaol. That is what can happen under a proportional system and it cannot be desirable.

Still less desirable under a PR system would be the unpleasant minority parties and all sorts of nutcases who would be elected. They could be much less pleasant than Liberal Democratic Members—who are, indeed, extremely pleasant—and might not be such congenial companions in the House. The equivalent of Mr. Le Pen's party would not make happy bedfellows for them, particularly if such a party held the balance of power. PR is an incentive for people to become more extreme. If they appeal to a minority in society, they are likely to be represented in Parliament.

The present system rules out extremism. Under the first-past-the-post system any party that wants to gain power in government must remain a broad church. It must have broadly moderate policies that are acceptable to the widest possible section of the population. The Labour party moved away from that and to the far left. As a result it paid a terrible electoral price in successive general elections. It appears now to have learnt its lesson, although perhaps it is just dressing itself up a little better. It is certainly true that if a political party wants power under our system, it must be a broad church, accommodating a broad range of opinion. A proportional system encourages extremism and extreme minorities.

Hon. Members have referred to the position in Israel. On a visit to that country I met the President, Chaim Herzog. He said that if there was one thing that he could do to improve his country before he ceased to be President, it would be to change the system of proportional representation back to the first-past-the-post system. He believed that the power of the minorities in Israel, particularly that of the religious groups, had profoundly damaged that country and prevented the settlement of the long-standing problems in the middle east.

1.54 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Some time ago, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, asked for 10-minute speeches and I shall time myself precisely. There is no less receptive an audience than that made up of people waiting for the speaker to finish so that they can participate. I wish that other hon. Members felt the same sensitivity.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made an interesting speech. I was struck by his idea that we have an impartial civil service. I have never believed that and, in many respects, it is a constitutional myth. If one reads Sir Bernard Ingham's book—after all he was a civil servant—he gives the lie to that statement. I admit, however, that he was something of an exception.

This debate has been excellent and I have thoroughly enjoyed it. It has been instructive and it has shown the House at its best. It has also revealed how conservative we can be and how exceedingly resistant this place is to procedural and constitutional change. The atmosphere in which this debate has been conducted, the motion behind it and public opinion demonstrate that the desire for change, and the readiness to discuss that change, is now widely accepted in this place and outside. That must be healthy for our democracy, as we should always be prepared to look critically at our institutions.

It is ridiculous to suggest that we have the finest electoral system in the world. I accept that we have one of the better ones, but there is plenty of room for improvement. We are sitting in a Commons where the Conservative party holds 60 per cent. of the mainland Commons seats, achieved with under 43 per cent. of the British vote. If the Government carry on losing by-elections, as they did last night, that statistic, which equates seats with the proportion of votes cast, will look better. However, there is a long way to go.

I am not seeking to make an anti-Conservative point —I am more than ready to do that on other occasions —but I believe that the Government of the day should be able to speak with the authority of the majority of the

[Mr. Tony Banks]

popular votes cast at the ballot box. A Government can then genuinely say that they represent the majority of the people.

There are many different forms of PR and we should be prepared to discuss the matter honestly and openly. I have not got the time to discuss all those different options now, but, in the same way as the Government should get 50 per cent. plus of the vote, I want to ensure that every individual Member is subject to that condition. A run-off ballot might achieve that end. We might have a second election day which would solve all the other arguments about the one-to-one relationship between the Member of Parliament and the constituency—a relationship which should be preserved. If we had such a run-off ballot at least it would mean that an hon. Member could come to the House and say that he or she genuinely represents at least 50 per cent. of his or her constituents.

I believe that the principle of PR is coming into favour in the country. It is coming into favour within the Labour party. There is still some way to go, but its day has arrived. However, the idea of PR comes better from one of the major parties, Conservative or Labour, than it does from the Liberal Democrats. When that party makes the proposal one can accuse it of being self-seeking, as it knows that PR is the only way in which it can increase its level of representation. When the proposal comes from the Conservative or Labour party, however, there is no self-seeking motivation. It means that those parties are making a genuine attempt to address the democratic argument and to try to find a way in which to achieve greater fairness within our electoral system.

In February 1931 the Labour Government passed a Bill through all its Commons stages to introduce the alternative vote for all-party elections. I do not know what Liberal MPs did at the time.

As I say, PR is coming, if for no other reason than that the European Community will at some stage insist that there should be proportional representation as a system of election throughout the EC. In Britain, it is gaining favour because people see it as a fairer system.

There are many aspects of our political institutions that I wish I had time to debate. I am in favour of a written constitution. There would have been no abolition of the GLC in those circumstances, but that is not my only reason for wanting a written constitution. I am in favour of a Bill of Rights and the abolition of the House of Lords. I take the Minister's point that if we had an elected House of Lords, what would we say if the other place said that it also had a mandate? My party will have to address that point in due course. I hope that we can at least agree that something must be done about the House of Lords, for one cannot defend any democratic system that maintains in one of its constituent parts the principle of heredity. We should have an elected head of state and we should have a greater use of referenda.

In February 1987 I put forward a Bill under the ten-minute rule procedure. It was designed to have a fixed term Parliament—a fixed election period—so that we would know the election date, as we do in local government, in the EC and in the United States. We are seeing today an unseemly exercise, with the Prime Minister exercising enormous powers and patronage. The ability to determine when an election shall be called gives him enormous power. All Prime Ministers want to retain such power. I would give them less, rather than more, power.

It is unsettling now to have a Government who are on their uppers, as it were, in the dog days of this Parliament, with the Prime Minister desperately trying to find a political window of opportunity. Whenever it comes, or when he thinks it has arrived, he will dive through it to his certain political suicide. But that is another matter.

We should remove that power from the Prime Minister and there should be an election before the date previously set only if a Government lose a vote of confidence. Other than that, they must serve out their time. That would bring back into the system far more certainty, and that would be good for the electorate and for business, because the unsettling aspect of when there will be a general election unsettles business nationally and internationally. I hope that Conservative Members will consider the point.

I introduced another Bill in the early part of 1987. At that time we were in a similar situation as we are today, with the Government looking for the most appropriate moment to serve the interests of the Conservative party. One cannot blame the Government of the day for doing that, but that power should not be possessed by any party. In that Bill I proposed compulsory voting at general elections, with a public holiday being declared on election day, as happens elsewhere in Europe.

People in this country sense the need for change. It may have something to do with the 11 years of Toryism. It certainly has something to do with the authoritarian style of the last Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) has put the desire for constitutional change very much on the political agenda. We should not embrace constitutional change merely because we do not want to see somebody like the right hon. Member for Finchley suddenly re-emerging from the political grave, though I know that I speak for many Conservative Members when I say that we do not want to see that happening, and that would be reason enough to go for constitutional change.

The British people are ready for change in the way in which we elect and organise our system of government. We should be prepared not only to discuss but to grant those changes because to do so would be good for the electoral process, which in turn would be good for the House of Commons.

2.4 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I postponed constituency business to attend the debate, because I was attracted by its title—"Constitutional Reform". The motion, however, refers to an obscure document,

"The . . . MORI opinion poll on the State of the Nation".

I have not seen the contents of that document, although its impressive bulk has been waved at me from the Liberal Democrats' Bench. The motion refers to

"this House, noting the results"

of the MORI poll, but we do not know what is in it: as I discovered last night, it is not even in the Library. I therefore assumed that the real subject of today's debate is the Liberal Democrats pet hobby horse, proportional representation, and I shall confine my remarks to that.

Anyone observing the Chamber at this moment would be impressed by the absence of Members of Parliament. Why are our colleagues absent? It is because they have

departed for their constituencies, be they in Brent, in the far reaches of Orkney and Shetland, in furthest Ulster, in Cornwall or in Wales.

Our constituents have a valuable asset, in the form of local Members of Parliament who are solely responsible for the smallest possible areas in the United Kingdom. We are elected locally, by local people; we are selected locally by local Liberal or Conservative associations, or by local Labour parties—unless, that is, the Labour candidate is gazumped by the new rule, "Kinnock knows best".

We are solely responsible for tackling local issues. I, for instance, have taken up in the House the subjects of the channel tunnel rail link, our local Gravesend hospital, the national dock labour scheme and various local road schemes; and I have done so because I am solely responsible to my constituents. Any system of proportional representation would break that powerful local link.

To be most arithmetically proportional, the system would have to provide for multi-Member constituencies. Each one of us can think of an example of what that would mean to us locally. I would be one of eight Members of Parliament representing west Kent: I would have to serve not only the people of Gravesend and Northfleet, but those of Dartford, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and, no doubt, the Medway towns and Maidstone—let us chuck those in for good measure. It would not be practically possible to get to know all those areas well enough to achieve the standard for which we all aim. Local contact would be diluted.

Under such a system, I would be one of eight Members of Parliament representing west Kent—five Conservatives, two Labour and one Liberal, let us say. What a buck-passer's paradise that would be! When my constituents came to me, I would say, "Which party do you support? Oh, you support Labour"—or the Liberal party—"so you should go and ask your own Members of Parliament to solve your problem." Alternatively, they might approach me as Conservatives, but with a problem that I could not or did not want to tackle. I could then say, "I am not a specialist. Try your luck with the other four Conservative Members for west Kent."

I want to be a Member of Parliament; how do I ensure that I am one of the five Conservative Members who are returned for west Kent? There are only two systems under which that would happen. Either the electors would elect a party list already ranked in order, or they would rank their Conservative candidates in a certain order, and they would be elected from that list.

In the first instance, I would know what to do. I would need to get chummy with the Conservative party establishment of west Kent, and grovel my way to the top of the list. In the second, I would have to contact the largest possible number of Conservative voters in the area. I would go to where the Conservative vote is the densest —*[Laughter.]* I mean that in a demographic rather than a mental sense.

I would go to Sevenoaks, to Tunbridge Wells and to Tonbridge; I would not go to Gravesend or Northfleet, which are in my current constituency, because proportionally there are fewer Conservatives to be found there. Conversely, not many Labour candidates would be seen on the streets of Sevenoaks or Tunbridge Wells. As for the Liberals, they would not know where to go to find their voters.

Either way, the system would make us, the elected Members of Parliament, more remote from our constituents. Our constituents would lose out. Just look at the size of those constituencies and ask how closely our Members of the European Parliament keep in touch with their electors. We know the answer to that question. Above all, we know what the practical pressures are on those of us who wish to serve in Parliament. It would push us towards our party hierarchies and away from our electors.

There is an alternative that could keep single-Member constituencies under proportional representation—the single transferable vote. We could keep the one Member, one constituency, but the result would be well and truly distorted. This was best summed up by Sir Winston Churchill who, in 1931, described it as

> "the worst of all possible plans . . . the stupidest, the least scientific and the most unreal. The decision . . . is to be determined by the most worthless votes given to the most worthless candidates."

The pressure on the candidate would be not to be positive, not to stick his neck out and not to offend people, or he would lose their second preference. In other words, "Be all things to all men." Speaking for myself, I was lucky enough to get 50·1 per cent. of positive votes, so I should not have that problem, but that is not guaranteed. I should have to be mighty careful not to upset those second and third candidate votes that might be redistributed to me.

There is yet another alternative proposal put before us—the so-called German system, under which one doubles the size of the constituencies. They each have one Member of Parliament. The other half of Parliament is slotted in by the national political parties, in accordance with the proportionality of the entire vote in the country. What would happen? We should become proportionately more remote from our constituents if we were constituency Members of Parliament. The top-up Members would be solely responsible to their national political parties and not to the electors.

What, then, would happen on a weekend such as this? I should be off to my constituency, my surgery and my work for double the area. The top-up Members of Parliament would be off to the golf course and the beach and would have no concern for the constituents. All that they would need to do would be to keep in with the party hierarchy in order to keep coming here. Any big move of the electoral tide would not dislodge most of them, particularly the Liberals who would be the top-up Members. I say particularly Liberal Members because they would continue to fail to win constituencies, yet their vote nationally would be piled up and dozens of Liberal Members would be coming to the House with no constituency contact whatsoever.

Why should there be any change? The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) tells us that proportional representation would be fairer. I sought to explain why I thought that it would not be fairer to my constituents, or to those of any other Member of Parliament. To whom would it be fairer—to the Liberals, to the pundits, to ordinary people? It might certainly be fairer to parties, but the House represents people; it does not represent parties. Just because parties cannot gain enough local support to return sufficient Members of Parliament is no reason for changing our centuries-old system of representative democracy, whereby Members of Parliament represent particular towns or parts of counties. Every Liberal Member of Parliament today is here because he obtained sufficient support locally. It is a worthwhile

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reflection, is it not, that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) would be the only Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for a vast area of south-east inner London. How would he cope with that and give to his constituents the sort of service on which he prides himself?

It is also worth reflecting on the fact that the Liberals would not be the only beneficiaries of proportional representation. It would also benefit other small parties, such as the communists, the Liverpool Militant Tendency —which, as we saw, defeated Labour candidates in Liverpool during the city elections only two weeks ago —the National Front and the Raving Loony party. When proportional representation was tried in France recently, it was reversed pretty quickly. It gave France Le Pen's extreme nationalists. There is also the example of Israel, which we have heard about today. Italy got the communists.

The siren message in favour of proportional representation that is put to our electors will do nothing but lose them their local Member of Parliament and local champion and stable government. That would help only the Liberal Democrats' narrow political interests, the pundits of the chattering classes—who would enjoy the statistics—the statisticians and, above all, the lovers of smoke-filled rooms.

2.14 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): In his last sentence, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) sought to write off the complaints of those who are concerned about our constitutional arrangements as the background noise of the chattering classes.

An article in *The Economist* on 11 May, which thankfully is no longer edited by Walter Bagehot, said:

"It is absurd to write off such complaints as the background noise of the chattering classes."

I agree. He characterised the British constitution by saying:

"It ain't broke, but like much of British industry in the 1970s its proper place is in a museum. It does not need to be fixed; it needs to be replaced."

If public opinion about our constitutional arrangements is changing—I have no doubt that it is—it is not because of the theoretical attractiveness of models of proportional representation, which have advantages and disadvantages, but because the public recognise that the system of government under which the country has operated is not delivering the goods. Measured by international yardsticks or against public expectations and hopes, successive Governments have fallen far short in delivering what a political system is expected to deliver.

The theoretical arguments about the structure of our constitution carry little weight with the sensible British public. What carries weight is their awareness that whereas Britain was once the most prosperous in Europe, our rating in the international league has declined steadily in the past two decades. They have seen the poor environment of our inner cities, the inadequate provision of services in rural communities, our education shortcomings and, compared with other countries, our failure to take people on to further and higher education. They have seen many brilliant scientists and inventors failing to translate their ideas into industrial pre-eminence. They have seen successive Governments committing themselves to curb the expansion of crime, but have noticed that crime is rising and now live in greater fear for their personal security.

Although we have a long-established legal system, in which many people have taken pride, there have been some spectacular failures and miscarriages of justice, which called into question the adequacy of our arrangements. The public have recognised that the legal system is inaccessible, except to the rich and very poor, who enjoy legal aid. They recognise that throughout the country provision for the arts and the environment is, at best, patchy. They recognise the extent of monopolist abuse. Above all, they recognise that for 20 years Conservative and Labour Governments have set themselves the twin targets of increasing employment and reducing inflation, but that, compared with countries operating under other constitutional systems, they have failed. The British public are increasingly convinced that it is not the dogmatisms, but the system that allows those dogmatisms to prevail against the good sense of the public, which is the explanation for the transparent failures of Governments in Britain.

Is it merely insularity and complacency that can lead to the conclusion that the Minister took 53 minutes of our debating time to expound? It is impossible to stand before the British public and laud the achievements of two decades of Labour and Conservative Governments. There have been two decades of missed opportunities, of late decision-making and of opportunities denied to the British people. I believe that the reason why the Minister chose to speak for 53 minutes in what has conventionally been regarded as a Back-Benchers' day was that he wanted to demonstrate one of the central weaknesses of our parliamentary democracy—the complete domination of the Chamber and of the legislature by the Executive.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *rose——*

Mr. Maclennan: I do not propose to give way once in view of the time that the Minister took. Fifteen minutes of his speech dealt with adversarial disputes about what happened after the by-election in Monmouth. That was the level to which he saw fit to drag a debate about the institutions of government. He began by saying that it was many decades since we had had such an opportunity, but he swept it aside to satisfy some of his headline-seeking Back-Benchers who wanted to abuse this opportunity.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In fairness to my hon. Friend the Minister, I must say that one reason why he took so long was that he had the courtesy to give way to other hon. Members.

Mr. Maclennan: The Minister is usually an extremely courteous man and I have exchanged views with him on many occasions. Indeed, I did so earlier today. However, I was incensed—justifiably so—by the way in which he twisted the debate and made it marginal and trivial when it is central and major. The reason why this country cannot get itself off its back is that we do not debate the issues raised by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) in his powerful speech, much of which I agreed with.

Some commonsensical statements have been made in this debate by some of the less elevated members of the House. The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) spoke simply and said that the system works so

leave it alone. Do the British public believe that the system works? It is increasingly clear that they do not. They think that the way in which the Minister treated the subject today is a bit of a farce. They think it a farce that bloated and inflated claims are made for the success of the Government against all the evidence of failures.

It is clear that our constitutional arrangements are almost unique in the democratic world. In the past 40 years, different Governments applying widely differing theories within the same constitutional framework have failed to deliver not only what they tried to deliver, but certainly what the public expected.

What is most striking in our constitutional arrangements is not so much that they are not defined in a written constitution, singular though that is. What is unique is the almost unlimited Executive dominance over the nation's affairs. Governments with only minority support are able to treat the whole country as a test-bed for a temporarily fashionable economic nostrum or political theory. Our unitary constitutional system, without effective checks and balances, causes the country to lurch in a zig-zag fashion according to the will of the flock master in Downing street. The people of Britain are not sheep to be corralled thus. Although it is imperfect, we live in a democracy. A halt is ultimately called to the wilder nonsenses of Governments such as the poll tax or Labour's utopian attempt to impose its so-called "social contract" on the nation's unwilling employees in 1978-79.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman was a member of the Labour party then.

Mr. Maclennan: I learned from that experience. The reversals of policy do not come in time to prevent hardship and great damage to the country's prospects. Our constitutional arrangements have not given us stability and direction. They have not given us constancy of purpose. An erratic course has been steered by successive Governments guided by dogmatism and doctrine.

What is most characteristically different about our constitutional arrangements is that we have the most centralised system of central Government in western Europe. Our system of government is even more centralised than that of France, where provincial government is being developed. Our system is more secretive than any other. The Minister told us today that he would like us to hear all that the Government thought that we should hear. It is precisely against such ministerial arrogance that constitutional safeguards need to be written in.

Our constitutional arrangements pay scant regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms of our citizens who are more frequently required to go to the court in Strasbourg to protect their rights than are the citizens of any other country in western Europe. Other countries settle such matters domestically in accordance with the tenets of a fundamental law which gives people rights that can be protected in their own courts. They do not have to go to Strasbourg.

The matters to which I have referred are strange and our country is singularly different from the other democracies with which we are associated in the European Community. The most dramatic and unacceptable feature of our parliamentary democracy is its unrepresentative nature. It results in the election of those who are dominant in the country, but who bear no accurate proportional relationship to the votes cast in the general election.

Electoral reform must be at the heart of constitutional reform. Anyone who believes in true democracy would want to see the wishes of the electorate reflected in the votes that can be cast in the House by hon. Members who are elected at large.

In the last general election, 43 per cent. of people voted for the Conservatives, yet the Conservatives ended up with 57·7 per cent. of the seats. Labour, with 30 per cent. of the vote, won 35 per cent. of the seats. The alliance, with rather less than 23 per cent. of the vote, won 3·4 per cent. of the seats. That is a travesty not only of fairness but of democracy itself.

The matter will not be put right until Conservative Members' attitude is more in tune with the expressions of opinion to which my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) drew attention, and until people at large cease to dismiss public opinion, as the Minister does, by trying to suggest that people do not understand the question. That sort of attitude displays——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Private Members' Bill

GAMING (AMENDMENT) BILL [*Lords*]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [10 May], That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

AGE OF LEGAL CAPACITY (SCOTLAND) BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered; read the Third time, and passed.

HARE COURSING BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee).
Order for consideration read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be considered on Friday 14 June.

EMPLOYMENT (UPPER AGE LIMITS IN ADVERTISEMENTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION (GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS HEADQUARTERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

PRESCRIPTION CHARGES (EXEMPT MEDICAL CONDITIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

EMPTY HOMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (TOBACCO SMOKING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ABOLITION OF POLITICAL HONOURS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (STREET LIGHTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 June.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

BADGERS (FURTHER PROTECTION) BILL

Read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Committee what day?

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Now, Sir. I beg to move, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that Mr. Speaker regularly deprecates the moving of such motions without prior notice.

Question put and agreed to.

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 June.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 June.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 June.

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 4936/91, relating to the European Energy Charter, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Party Conferences

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department for being present to reply to this debate despite his family bereavement. I offer him my sincere sympathy on the death of his father.

I welcome this opportunity to raise once again the cost of policing the conference of the party in government. That issue unites members of all parties in the House and at county council level. It also unites north and south, because Dorset and Sussex are affected, although it is true to say that Lancashire is the most badly affected because a conference is held in Blackpool every two years.

I am pleased that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Miscampbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) have been able to join us. But for prior constituency engagements, my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Lee) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) and the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) would have been present today.

The subject of this debate has been raised on many occasions in the House as well as in meetings with the Home Secretary. In December 1985 a delegation met the Home Secretary and there were further talks in October 1987 with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) when he was at the Home Office.

In February 1988 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary refused to meet a deputation, but in July 1989 there was a meeting with Lord Ferrers. In May 1990 there was another meeting with the Home Secretary. In between there were debates and questions in the House. We have certainly been persistent and I make no apology for raising the issue once more. I believe that the case that we have put forward on each previous occasion has been just, even if that fact has not yet been recognised by the Government. We do not intend to let the matter drop, even if the reply from my hon. Friend the Minister today is, sadly, no more helpful than on previous occasions. We should be letting our constituents down if we failed to continue to press for fair play.

The tragic and evil events in Brighton in 1984 clearly meant that from then onwards the resources devoted to policing the conference of the party in government had to be increased to ensure that that sad event could not be repeated. No one could disagree with that. The alternative would have been to cancel the conference and thereby give in to terrorism. That is simply not an option. We must continue as normally as possible, but take all the necessary precautions to safeguard the lives of Ministers and others attending the conference. The police forces of Lancashire, Sussex and Dorset now do that with commendable efficiency, patience and at great cost to the community charge payers of those counties. Because it is necessary to provide security at the highest level for members of the Government, the issue attains national importance and as such it should be funded nationally.

The policing implications for the conference have a serious effect on the adequacy and efficiency of the policing of the remainder of the police area in the run-up to, and during, the conference. The situation can be eased only by incurring considerable expenditure on overtime payments.

One argument against providing special funding has been that, from time to time, all police forces have to deal with matters that place considerable financial burdens upon them. That may be so, but although an unusual murder, for example, can occur anywhere, the Blackpool conference occurs only in Lancashire, and it occurs every other year. No other force has or will have that commitment.

It was said in a ministerial reply that, from time to time, every force has to face requirements that could be argued to be of national rather than local origin. For Lancashire, the conference does not occur from time to time; it represents a continuing and substantial financial burden.

The main argument against increasing the amount of grant is that a party conference is far from the only event which could be claimed as having primarily national significance. It is claimed that most police authorities might make similar claims in other circumstances. On 11 January 1990, the Minister told us that one example of such a factor for which police authorities would want to make a claim for extra resources would be increased costs in relation to the protection of Ministers. We in Lancashire understand that problem because we faced those extra costs, too, when my former right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Ribble Valley was Home Secretary. On previous occasions, the Lancashire police authority and Lancashire hon. Members have pressed for extra support for the additional costs incurred by police authorities in providing security for Ministers.

I am grateful to the Government for listening to and accepting the arguments in relation to that claim and, more important, for deciding to include supernumerary police officers on special protection duty in the measure of police establishment for the police spending assessment in 1991-92. That decision was welcomed by Lancashire police authority and by Lancashire's community charge payers. The decision was correct, because considerable costs can be incurred for which there was previously no additional funding, simply by accident of place of residence.

However, given that the Government recognised the justice of that case, I am at a complete loss to understand how they can continue to decide not to treat the additional costs of policing the Government party conferences in the same way. The principles involved are the same. My constituents and the people of Lancashire, Dorset and Sussex find it difficult to understand how the cost of providing special protection for a Minister when he is at home qualifies for additional funding, but when the same Minister meets the rest of his ministerial colleagues for a week in Blackpool, Bournemouth or Brighton, there is no additional contribution from central Government. In effect, we are saying that when there is a relatively small increased cost to many different police authorities, we will help them, but when there is a large additional cost falling on one police authority, we will not. I see no logic, justice or sense in that.

I welcome the increased spending on the police that has taken place under this Government. Unlike the previous Labour Government, we have recognised the need to pay the police properly and to increase the strength of police forces. Lancashire had its share of benefits from that increase, which enabled the authority to recruit more policemen and policewomen to combat rising crime.

[Mr. Ken Hargreaves]

However, my constituents feel—I am sure that the feeling is shared by other people in Lancashire—that the £0·5 million that had to be found by community charge payers in Lancashire to help pay the policing costs of the previous party conference could more beneficially, at least from the point of view of my communiity charge payers, have been spent on further increasing police manpower in the county, and not least in Hyndburn.

To sum up, it is clear that the costs of protecting Ministers are exceptional, whether they be at home or at their party conference. In respect of the former, the argument has already been conceded, and a relatively simple adjustment has been made to the standard spending assessment methodology to make it possible to deal with ministerial protection. A similar simple adjustment could be made to cover security provision at the Government party's conference. On behalf of my constituents and the people of Lancashire generally, as well as those in Sussex and Dorset, I hope that the Minister will agree that the present situation is even more unfair and illogical than previously and that he will seek to make the necessary changes.

2.44 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Gentleman have the consent of both the Minister and the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves)? I see that he does.

Mr. Mans: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on gaining an opportunity for this debate. I thoroughly endorse everything that he said. My constituency abuts Blackpool. I am aware of the tremendous arrangements that have to be made every year for party conferences, but especially every other year when the Government party goes to Blackpool. Each time that that happens, the security arrangements have to be that much more detailed and expensive. We are rapidly approaching the point where the Government must agree that this cannot go on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn made the good point that an adjustment in the standard spending assessment was made for the protection of Ministers of the Crown. I cannot see why precisely the same method cannot be used for Government party conferences. I fully understand the various arguments made about counties that have other events, but, as my hon. Friend said, no other county is the same as Lancashire, because Blackpool has the Government party conference every other year. The problem has continued for decades and recently the burden has become excessive.

I request that my hon. Friend the Minister examine closely the matter again and determine whether we can use the present methodology for funding local government to provide more help for Lancashire and the other two counties affected by the Government party conference.

2.46 pm

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman have the consent of the hon. Member for Hyndburn and the Minister? I see that he has.

Mr. Miscampbell: I have the appropriate leave and I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) for giving me a few minutes of his precious time. I am a Blackpool Member, but I shall not confine my remarks to Blackpool. Blackpool is one of the three main conference resorts where the problem of funding security arrangements for the big political conferences arises.

In Blackpool the Government party conference causes disruption. Clearly, I shall not go into the arrangements, but some security measures have to be taken for months before a conference comes. Blackpool pays its share, like Lancashire.

All the hon. Members present are Lancashire Members and it is about Lancashire that I wish to make a point. Lancashire has to pay for security which does not benefit the people of the town or the rest of the county in any way. The expenses fall on the police. I should have thought that a way of overcoming the problem would be to include a specific sum in the police grant to acknowledge the problems of the three main conference resorts.

One has only to ask what would happen if the three main conference towns said that enough was enough. I suspect that the Government would find that it was convenient to provide the security money that seems so necessary. We have argued the case time and again. We have met Ministers. In a wide area of Lancashire people do not understand why the money is not available. I should go so far as to say that in many areas of Lancashire, and I am sure in Hyndburn, there is frustration which borders on anger.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I appreciate the sympathetic reference made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) to my father's death.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this Adjournment debate. He shows himself a persistent advocate of Lancashire's interests, as he sees them, especially on this issue, which is an important one. We all recognise that party conferences, especially of the party in government, place a considerable burden on the local police, whether in Lancashire, Dorset or Sussex. The strong views of the counties involved are well known and have been considered carefully by successive Home Secretaries. We have discussed the question before in this Chamber, most recently on 11 January 1990 in an Adjournment debate obtained by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) to which I also responded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn made a most effective speech then and, if I recollect rightly, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Miscampbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) intervened, as they did today. They did not use exactly the same words, but their sentiments were much the same. I am afraid that I shall pay them a similar compliment by using different words from those I used last time to present similar sentiments. I apologise to the House if I repeat some essential aspects of the points that I made last year, but the arguments simply have not changed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn has argued forcefully that the scale of costs involved in policing the

Government party conference means that it is unreasonable to expect the burden to fall on the county concerned, and that central Government should meet the costs. First, central Government already meet the greater part of policing costs, directly or indirectly. Fifty-one per cent. police specific grant is paid by the Home Office on all police current expenditure. Further support is provided through the police component of revenue support grant. That alone accounts for about three quarters of police expenditure. If we take into account the redistributed business rate and the community charge, we see that the proportion of policing costs met by the local charge payer is relatively small.

The House will recall that in 1986 police specific grant was increased from 50 to 51 per cent., providing substantial additional financial support for all police forces, in recognition of, among other things, the growing burden posed by terrorism. As I pointed out last year, Lancashire has received considerably more revenue from this increase in grant than the increase in costs for policing party conferences: since 1986 an additional £3·4 million in grant, against conference costs for 1987 and 1989 totalling about £1·9 million. Similar calculations can be applied to other counties hosting conferences and the details will be found at column 1193 of the *Official Report*. It would be wrong for me to take up the House's time now by repeating the figures that I set out last year.

The extensive funds made available for policing are not tied to any particular policing activity. That is properly a matter for the operational judgment of the chief constable. The bulk of policing is, and probably always will be, primarily local in character. Central Government funds are properly used for this. Specific grant and other sources of funding are our contribution to the overall needs of policing—a contribution which we are glad to make and which is a natural part of our tripartite policing structure with its balance of powers, duties and resources between the police authority, the chief constable and the Home Secretary.

I do not believe that because some events are supposedly more national than local, they should be funded wholly by central Government. Directly and indirectly, central Government already meet the lion's share of the costs of both national and local demands as it is. If we follow the logic of the argument to its conclusion, perhaps we should find local communities expected to meet the full cost of purely local policing.

It is self-evidently nonsense to try and define policing in terms of its national or its local significance. There is no such clear dividing line. If asked, I am sure that every chief constable in the country could point to expenditure on matters of national significance in his area, for which he would welcome 100 per cent. funding. Wiltshire could point to the annual solstice celebrations at Stonehenge and Thames Valley to the costs of protecting royal residences; Dover is a port of entry to the United Kingdom, not just to Kent; national heritage sites attract foreign visitors in enormous numbers; and so on. If any hon. Member sat down with his chief constable it would not take long to add to that list. The truth of the matter is that there is a mix of national and local interest in all policing, and that mix is reflected in the structure and funding arrangements for the police.

Expenditure on policing party conferences is not, the Government believe, so different in character from other events as to justify entirely separate arrangements. If it were, I think that that would imply some fairly radical alterations to the basis of our policing. The case then can only be that the scale of the expenditure justifies special help.

In very rare cases, additional central support has been provided where forces have faced burdens that self-evidently cannot be met. But that is a strict test, and properly so. We are talking about wholly exceptional events that could not have been foreseen—and therefore budgeted for—and which pose such a burden that the efficiency and effectiveness of the force will be seriously threatened.

Party conferences are, of course, entirely predictable events, booked far ahead. By definition, they can be planned for and budgeted for—as, indeed, they have been for many years. While the expenditure is considerable, it is clearly not on a scale to prevent a force from providing an effective standard of policing. I must again refer to my remarks of last year. The additional cost of policing the Conservative party conference in Blackpool in 1989 was around 1·6 per cent. of a police budget of £96·8 million. In 1987, it was around 1 per cent. of the budget. For the conference in Bournemouth last year, the figure was nearly £2 million or 4 per cent. of Dorset's police expenditure of around £52·5 million. I agree that those are very substantial sums, even when grant of 51 per cent. has been paid on them, but they are not on a scale to threaten the effectiveness of a force as a whole. They have been, and can be, met by prudent planning by the police authority. I believe that they pose far less of a threat to a force than unforeseeable demands such as a major murder inquiry or a national disaster.

I understand the strength of feeling of hon. Members on this issue and we have been ready to listen to deputations urging their case. Lord Waddington, then Home Secretary, met a Lancashire deputation about a year ago to listen to its concerns. At his invitation, it submitted a paper setting out some detailed proposals. As my hon. Friends know, it was subsequently agreed that supernumerary officers on protection duties should be included in calculating police standard spending assessments—my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn specifically mentioned that—and hence in the distribution formula for revenue support grant. The Home Office could not accept that party conferences should somehow be translated into "notional manpower equivalents" and included in the distribution formula on that basis. It is after all, a formula for distributing a given sum and Lancashire's gain would be some other county's loss—a county with, perhaps an equally important national demand of a different sort. That prospect would have ultimately created a complex annual system of special pleading, however deeply felt, from every force and would prove unworkable in practice. After full consideration we rejected the proposal and Lord Waddington wrote to the Lancashire authorities explaining why. Although Lancashire has sought a further meeting to discuss the same point, my right hon. Friend the present Home Secretary has taken the view that there would be little to be gained by a further meeting to go over ideas that have already been discussed at a meeting and considered fully in writing.

I hope that my hon. Friends will recognise that the Government have given long and careful attention to the issues. We have been ready to discuss points in detail and to explain the position to those who have asked to put their

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

views in person. I am standing at the Dispatch Box for the second time in a year and a half to discuss the issues with my hon. Friends.

I conclude by stating the Government's position unequivocally. Policing covers a wide range of activities. All forces know that some of their activities are primarily of local benefit, while others, to varying degrees, will benefit the country at large. A very large part of police funding is already met centrally, and the Government believe that there is no basis on which counties hosting party conferences should somehow be singled out for specially favourable financial treatment. I wish that I could give my hon. Friends encouragement on the issue, but it would be misleading if I did.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 20 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Benefits

2. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receive family credit; and how many received family income supplement in 1978-79.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): I am pleased to tell the House that at the end of February 1991 there were 322,000 families in receipt of family credit—a figure more than four times higher than the 79,000 families who were in receipt of family income supplement in February 1979. The figure is the latest available, but does not fully reflect the full effects of the recent advertising campaign.

Mr. Greenway: Is not this increase in the number of families receiving special help through family credit—more than four times the number who used to receive the old family income supplement—a vindication of the Government's policy of introducing this rather better structured benefit? Will my hon. Friend undertake a review of the arrangements for claims by self-employed people on low incomes, many of whom find the process of claiming onerous and taxing? Does he agree that if the Government streamlined the application process that would show their clear commitment to helping low-income families facing genuine hardship?

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for his commendation of family credit. He asked specifically about the structure of the benefit. It may be worth reflecting that 65 per cent. of people on the benefit receive £20 a week or more, 30 per cent. receive £40 a week or more and 17 per cent. receive £50 a week or more. Forty-five per cent. of the self-employed get £50 a week or more. I assure my hon. Friend that work is under way at the university of York to investigate the matters to which he referred.

Mr. Battle: Do not those figures show that more people need family credit because of an increase in poverty resulting from low pay? Will the Minister tell us the percentage uptake of family credit? That would be the key figure.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman is something of an expert on social security and he will know that not until the publication of the 1989 family expenditure survey will an accurate figure be available to answer his question. However, I can tell him that, as a result of our advertising campaign, claims are running at an all-time high of about 20,000 a week. I like to think that that reflects improved awareness of the excellence of the structure of family credit.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend tell the House exactly how much money the taxpayer is spending on such support? Will he confirm that the Opposition thought that the benefit should be allowed to "wither on the vine"? What will people claiming the benefit do if that happens?

Mr. Jack: I assure my hon. Friend that, far from allowing this excellent credit to wither on the vine, we have fertilised its roots. The uptake is growing considerably and we estimate that we shall spend some £543 million on it this year.

Dietary Requirements

3. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research into dietary requirements he took into account in setting income support levels.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Income support, which was introduced in April 1988, is structured to provide extra benefit to groups facing the greatest pressures. Those groups were identified by the Department's analysis of low-income groups and the findings of a research survey commissioned by the Government from the Policy Studies Institute.

Mr. Cohen: Does the Minister acknowledge that income support levels are miserably low when set against nutritional needs? The poor get ripped off for the food that they have to buy. It may be cheap, but it is of poor quality. Families in my constituency tell me that on present income support levels they cannot afford to get take-away fish and chips once a month. Does not that tell the Minister that there is something fishy about income support levels? They are too low.

Miss Widdecombe: Our medical advice is that there is no reason why someone on income support should not be able to follow a normal and healthy diet. Where a general practitioner decides that it is in a patient's interests to have an additional special diet, it is available on prescription. The hon. Gentleman will know that prescriptions for those on income support are free.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will my hon. Friend examine one technical problem that arises—that of people faced with bringing up a family on their own? If people in that unhappy position go back to school or take up training, they lose income support and that puts them in a dreadful Catch-22 situation. Can the problem be redressed?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend will be aware that responsibilities for maintaining young people in education and for supplying training to older people reside respectively with my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Employment. Training, employment and education are vital in enabling people to become free of state benefits and to go back to work. I assure my hon. Friend that much attention is directed to the problem that he mentions.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the Minister confirm that people with AIDS could receive £30 a week before April 1988 for a special diet and nothing afterwards? Has the Department yet replied to Naomi Wayne, of the Terrence Higgins Trust, about the misuse of Anita MacDonald's research? Will she comment on Katie Peck's research, which showed that a high-protein, high-calorie therapeutic diet for people with symptomatic HIV in London now costs £42 a week? Why should they be left to complain that they are literally dying for want of the help that was available before April 1988?

Miss Widdecombe: I must refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave a few moments ago —that those who need special additions which cannot be provided within a normal diet can obtain them on prescription. Our medical advice is that a high-calorie, high-protein diet can be achieved within the support that we are currently making available. The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is not likely to be overlooked and we have the matter under constant review.

Low-Income Families

4. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any estimate of the number of low-income families facing marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent. *(a)* in 1978-79 and *(b)* for the latest year for which figures are available.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): As a result of the social security reforms, virtually no families have marginal deduction rates of over 100 per cent. in 1991-92. In 1985, 70,000 families had potential deduction rates of over 100 per cent. The 1985 figure is the earliest available.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. Will he confirm that the latest figures on low incomes show that families with children in the bottom fifth of income distribution received increases in income of 19 per cent. in real terms between 1981 and 1987? Does not this give the lie to much false propaganda about the poor getting poorer under the Conservative Governments?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly confirm my right hon. Friend's figure, which is drawn directly from last week's Select Committee report on low incomes. It helps to put in perspective some of the wilder and more misleading claims by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher).

Mr. Wigley: Does the Secretary of State accept that some people in the very low income groups are poorer as a result of increases in fixed costs, such as water rates, which have gone up by 50 per cent. in Wales in the past two years? Will he undertake to examine methods of helping low-income people suffering from high water rates to see whether, in parallel with changes on the introduction of the council tax, something analogous to community charge benefit might be introduced?

Mr. Newton: To take the latter part of the question first, I am not sure that I would want to go down the path of adding to the complexity of our benefit structure a water rate benefit, because it would give rise to questions whether there should be an electricity or gas benefit, or benefits for other charges. The right course is to take account of all these things when we look at the annual increase in benefits and that is something that I always keep under review.

Mr. Meacher: What is the point of boasting about lower marginal deduction rates when, according to the Select Committee figures that the Secretary of State cited a moment ago, the incomes of the poorest 5 million people have, after three periods of Tory Government, fallen by an average of 6·2 per cent? Is not it an obscenity that the numbers of people with less than half average incomes has more than doubled since 1979, yet the salaries of Social Security Ministers, who are supposed to meet the needs of such people have risen over the same period by more than 240 per cent? As the Government believe in performance-related pay, is not it high time that the Secretary of State apologised for his failure by taking a massive cut in his pay?

Mr. Newton: All that the hon. Gentleman has done in the past few seconds is to do what he did last week—use the figures on a basis that the Select Committee and the Institute of Fiscal Studies, both of which are independent of the Government, warned is not the most sensible and proper way to use the figures. The Select Committee report says:

"Real disposable incomes grew by more than 30 per cent. between 1979 and 1988, with increases in real income being seen at all levels of the income scale."

The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that.

Invalid Care Allowance

5. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have benefited from increases in the earnings disregard in invalid care allowance in the last two years.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The number of people getting invalid care allowance and declaring earnings has more than doubled since March 1990.

Mr. Norris: Given the eminent good sense of helping those who want to care for disabled people to do so at home, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the fact that the number of those who can claim an allowance while caring for invalids at home rose from 5,000 when the Government came into office to over 125,000 last year. Given the evident success of enhancing the earnings disregard, which last year more than doubled the number of people who are able to claim it while working, will my right hon. Friend take on board the idea of extending the earnings disregard principle further?

Mr. Scott: We monitor this carefully. It is worth reminding the House that expenditure has increased from £4 million in 1978-79 to £213 million in 1990-91. That shows our concern for those who care for the most severely disabled. I am equally convinced that generous earnings allowances encourage the carers to join or remain in employment.

Lone Parents

6. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the lastest available figures for the proportion of lone parents who receive maintenance.

Mr. Newton: Research undertaken in 1989 in connection with the White Paper "Children Come First" shows that only 30 per cent. of lone mothers and 3 per cent. of lone fathers receive regular maintenance.

Mr. Greenway: Is not it time that fathers—and mothers where appropriate—took responsibility for their children after walking out on them, rather than expecting society to fund their responsibilities to the tune of billions of pounds?

Mr. Newton: In a word, yes. I am glad that we shall, I hope, make substantial further progress in that direction with the Child Support Bill, which received its Third Reading in another place last week and which I hope will be debated here before too long.

Mr. Frank Field: As the Government have allowed, over the past 11 years, the near-collapse of the payment of maintenance from fathers and mothers on supplementary benefit income support, I welcome their 11th-hour conversion. Will the Minister give an undertaking that any moneys that are gained by the payment of this maintenance will be ploughed back into the social security budget and not paid back to the Treasury?

Mr. Newton: I would not wish to be taken as accepting the way in which the hon. Gentleman put the first part of his supplementary question. Substantial efforts were made over the two or three years before the Child Support Bill was put before Parliament to increase the amount of maintenance moneys being collected. As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we need to consider all the relevant factors together. Large additional sums of benefit have been directed towards low-income families, including lone-parent families, for many years. We wish to ensure that there is a proper balance between what the taxpayer finds and what is found by others.

Pensioners

7. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners own their own homes; and whether he has made any estimate of how this is likely to change over the next 20 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest information shows that, in 1987, 49 per cent. of pensioners owned their own homes compared with only 40 per cent. in 1979. As an even higher proportion of younger people now own their own homes, we have every reason to believe that that upward trend will continue into the next century.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend will agree that the figures bear testament to the Government's positive action to encourage home ownership. As increased home ownership works through into the pensioner age group over the next decade, the next two decades and onwards, will my hon. Friend do everything in her power to encourage policies that will enable the asset value of home ownership to be uesd to help pensioners in their later years when they need every penny of income that they can get?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There are already schemes to help pensioners to use the capital asset of their homes where that would help them because their current income is restricted. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. As I have said, there are already such policies and they will continue to be produced.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that over the past 10 years we have taken great steps forward to improve security for pensioners in terms of their income, their homes and their persons? Will she confirm that there has been a great increase in home ownership and an increase in telephone links to those homes, from 50 to over 80 per cent? Will she consider further ways of extending that and other home security measures so that pensioners feel that they have security at home as well as in the street?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that there has been an increase in all forms of pensioners' income. There was a 31 per cent. rise in pensioners' incomes during the first eight years of this Government. There has been a substantial increase in the ownership of telephones and of all consumer goods by pensioners. In general, there has been a rise in the economic position of pensioners, including their savings, income and home ownership.

Mr. Skinner: I did not rise earlier, Mr. Speaker, because of trouble with the cruciate ligament in my left knee.

Bearing in mind the fact that there are about 70,000 home repossessions a year, may I ask the Minister how many pensioners have had their homes repossessed? Given the consequent difficulties for local authorities, will the hon. Lady have a word with the appropriate Minister in the Department of the Environment to ensure that local authorities are able to rehouse pensioners whose homes have been repossessed? The authorities have not had the money to build houses and bungalows for those people.

Miss Widdecombe: Only 4 per cent. of pensioners are still paying a mortgage. All other pensioners who own their homes own them outright. The problem of repossessions is not as great among pensioners as it is in the rest of the population.

9. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners have some form of private income to top up the state pension and benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend will be interested to hear that in 1987 a total of 84 per cent. of pensioners received some form of income other than the retirement pension and associated state benefits.

Mr. Moss: Does my hon. Friend agree that those excellent and revealing statistics underline yet again the encouragement that the Government have given to people to save for their retirement? Is she aware that that resulted in a major increase in pensioners' incomes of about 31 per cent. between 1979 and 1987?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed, and more than half all pensioners now enjoy the benefits of an occupational pension. As an even larger percentage of recently retired pensioners have occupational pensions, there is every prospect of increasing independence among the elderly.

Mr. Winnick: Why should there be any room for complacency when, on the Government's own figures, two thirds of all pensioners have incomes of less than £5,000 a year? When will the Government apologise—if ever—for the way in which, 10 years ago, they broke the link between pensions and earnings? As a consequence, a married pensioner couple is now £24 a week worse off and a single pensioner £14 a week worse off. That is directly attributable to the actions of a Tory Government.

Miss Widdecombe: I see no reason to apologise for a 31 per cent. rise in pensioners' incomes, when all that a Labour Government could manage was a 3 per cent. increase—and that despite the operation of an earnings link. That proves that it is not an earnings link that matters, but the overall state of the economy.

Mrs. Roe: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware that many people are anxious to learn the Government's views on equalisation of the state pension age and the implications that that will have for private pension schemes. Can my hon. Friend say what action has been taken by other countries in the European Community and whether we might learn a lesson from it?

Miss Widdecombe: For some time, the Government have been committed in principle to equalisation of pension ages. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that it presents immense practical economic, demographic and social difficulties. We maintain our commitment to equalisation and the question of pensionable age is being debated throughout Europe. Many European countries are considering proposals for raising the pensionable age to achieve equalisation. We are not ready to present detailed proposals, but we are committed in principle to that very important policy.

Mr. Allen McKay: When considering pensioners' incomes, will the Government consider not only the numbers involved but the amounts payable? Many thousands of elderly people receive a very small pension, so can the Under-Secretary confirm that it is not the Government's intention to means-test benefits or state pensions?

Miss Widdecombe: It is precisely because we recognise the huge variety of income levels among the elderly that we target resources at the poorer pensioner. It is also why, over the past two years, we have directed £280 million in additional support at the poorer pensioner. Even those above the income support line have available to them housing benefit, community charge benefit, free NHS prescriptions and other benefits that are available in full to those who are on income support. Our policies acknowledge that there is not a homogeneous income level among the elderly and, accordingly, direct assistance towards those most in need.

National Insurance

10. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals would be affected by the removal of the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Newton: Based on 1990-91 figures, if the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions were removed, it is estimated that about 3·4 million people would pay more in contributions. If the corresponding upper profits limit for self-employed people were also removed, it is estimated that about another 0·5 million people would also pay more in contributions.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Will my right hon. Friend draw attention to the fact that the vast increases in social security payments and health service expenditure that occur almost every year are funded not by any special taxes but from the wealth of the nation—which is created only by Conservatives? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that because of the ceiling placed on national insurance contributions advanced by the Opposition, one seventh of the working population would have to pay additional taxes?

Mr. Newton: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. The more rapid economic growth achieved over the past decade under the present Government has been a crucial factor in enabling greater spending on both health and social security and in reversing some of the cuts in the hospital capital building programme that were made by the previous Labour Government. It is becoming clearer by the day that a significant part of the population—including senior nurses, managers and middle-managers, experienced teachers and many others—would be hit very hard by Labour's proposals for financing some of their promises.

Mr. Allen: Does the Secretary of State agree that many people earning £20,000, £30,000, £100,000 or £1 million a year see the justice of paying national insurance contributions on all their income? They see the justice because they know that it will fund an increase in pensions for the single pensioner of £5 a week and for the couple of £8 a week, with index linking thereafter, as well as restoring child benefit to its 1987 level. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that national insurance payers are annoyed because they are having to fork out an extra £6 billion a year to pay for the Secretary of State's scheme to get people to opt out of state sector pensions and into private pension plans?

Mr. Newton: Very large numbers of those who will be expected to pay sizeable imposts under the Labour party's proposals will feel that there is no reason why they should pay increased national insurance contributions to finance a non-national insurance benefit, which has never before been paid out of the national insurance fund—child benefit. For the first time, they will apparently be expected to pay large amounts in national insurance contributions, for which they will gain no benefit.

Child Support Agency

11. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what long-term savings he expects to make as a result of the operation of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Jack: It is expected that the agency's operation will reduce the taxpayer's expenditure on benefit by an additional £400 million per year in the long term. That is in addition to the benefit savings presently being achieved of £180 million.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that many women, and some men, in my constituency of Basildon are valiantly bringing up families on their own, with no support from their former partners and that they are delighted with the Government's legislative proposals? I accept the impressiveness of the figures which my hon. Friend announced, but will he take this opportunity to reassure the House that the Child Support Agency is not just to do with saving money on the overall expenditure on benefits?

Mr. Jack: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his considerable interest in this subject. He has corresponded

with me on behalf of the women's refuge and battered wives' home in his constituency. I should like to reassure him and the House that this is not merely about benefit savings. First and foremost, it is about establishing a line of responsibility for maintenance by absent fathers for their children. It is also a pathway to the future for some of those lone parents who wish to go back to work through the changes that we are making to family credit by reducing the number of hours from 24 to 16, thus making this benefit much more accessible to them, and giving them £15 of any maintenance recovered in the form of a disregard at that time.

Mr. Janner: Is there any hope of any of that £400 million saved being used for day nurseries or other facilities so that lone parents who wish to go back to work can afford to do so? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the problem is not merely the award of maintenance but its collection? Many women who are back at work and earning about as much as they need to pay the babysitter have no financial help, no resources, no offer from the Government and not much hope for the future.

Mr. Jack: There is hope for the future. The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned collection. The Child Support Agency will be powerful and fully equipped, both administratively and with information technology, to do the job of collecting maintenance. I have said that the women to whom the hon. and learned Gentleman referred would be on family credit and I have described the improvements in that benefit which will arise in parallel with this measure. I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to example 10 in the White Paper, "Children Come First", where he will see well exemplified the point which he draws to my attention, showing that women will be better off in work with family credit as we propose it.

Mr. Lester: Although I welcome the principle of the Child Support Bill, will my hon. Friend also take account of the fact that many fathers are denied access to their children because of marital difficulties and that one reason why they do not support their children is that their previous spouse may make it difficult for them to play a part in their children's upbringing? Will he bear it in mind that that factor is critical when striking a balance? Fathers should support children, but they should also have a part to play in their upbringing.

Mr. Jack: There have been many representations to the Government on the Child Support Bill and that matter. We have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. Access arrangements are entirely matters for the courts during, for example, divorce proceedings. I certainly would not like financial help for children to be used as a lever, to a child's detriment.

Independent Living Fund

12. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last had discussions with voluntary bodies on the future of the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: I have received representations from many bodies on the future of the independent living fund. We will, of course, take them into account when making decisions about the future of the fund.

Mr. McFall: The Government set up the independent living fund as a knee-jerk response to repressive social security legislation in 1987. There will be no future for disabled people after 1992, and the Minister knows that. I have received representations from many disabled people. They know that the budget is cash limited instead of being dependent on need. When will the Minister have a decent answer for disabled people, so that they will have a future, just like able-bodied people in our society?

Mr. Scott: I should have expected a harangue rather than a proper question about the future of the independent living fund. As the hon. Gentleman knows, between its inception and this financial year, we have increased expenditure on the fund tenfold to meet the needs of severely disabled people. We shall listen carefully to the arguments when we debate Lords amendments to the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill tomorrow, and we look forward to responding then.

Mr. Hannam: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of disabled people and of those who are interested in their welfare on the establishment of the fund and on the huge tenfold increase in Government funding? Does he accept that voluntary organisations are concerned about the future of special funding for the 7,000 or 8,000 severely disabled people who are helped by the fund because after 1993 responsibility is likely to pass to local authorities? Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that funds will be available from local authorities when that change takes place?

Mr. Scott: As I said to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), we shall have an extended opportunity tomorrow to consider that matter when we discuss Lords amendments to the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill. I look forward to responding more fully then. I recognise the importance of ensuring that, after 1993, proper arrangements are made to cope with the needs of severely disabled people.

Mr. Frank Field: Can the Government name a single organisation that supports the proposal to wind up the fund in 1993?

Mr. Scott: In making that point, the hon. Gentleman prejudges the arrangements that will be made for either existing or new cases. The vast majority—indeed, the totality—of those who represent disabled people are anxious that proper arrangements are made after 1993 to ensure that the needs of disabled people are properly taken into account.

Low-income Families

13. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of low-income families which faced marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent. in 1978-79 and the latest year for which figures are available.

15. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of low-income families which faced marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent. in 1978-79 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply that I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) earlier today.

Mr. Sumberg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. His earlier answer set out our commendable record. Is he aware that this weekend the Labour party dropped its pledge to low-income families to introduce a lower rate of tax for the poorest in our community? Is not that another example of the chaos and confusion in the Labour party on its proposals to help the lowest paid?

Mr. Newton: It is becoming increasingly difficult to understand the Labour party's commitments on these matters, except that they would clearly cost an amount that the country could not afford.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that on taking office in 1979 we found that one of the worst effects of the previous Labour Government was that many people would have been better off on the dole although they were working long, hard hours in low-paid jobs? Does he agree that the Government's great achievement is that they tackled that problem with a combination of better family credit payments and reductions in taxation for the low paid? It would be a great shame if a future Government were to reverse that.

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. One of the worst defects of the social security system as we originally found it was that it did not pay large numbers of people to work at all. That is not satisfactory from anyone's point of view, including that of those people. I regard the fact that we have reduced that number so greatly as a major gain.

Mr. Pike: Is not the Secretary of State concerned about low-income families who may be forced to take out an essential loan and then find that the capital for that loan is taken into account as income, thereby losing them their entitlement to benefit? Is not that wrong and does not it penalise low-income families?

Mr. Newton: I must admit that I am not certain what point the hon. Gentleman is making. However, the availability of interest-free loans under the social security system in certain circumstances is an important advantage to many people compared with people just above the social security income support level who have to borrow at commercial rates.

Mr. Wilson: Is the Minister aware of a written reply that I received from his Department recently which set out a table of the marginal benefit increases for earnings between £100 and £150 a week? That table revealed the extraordinary fact that an average family with two children paying average rent and average poll tax and with entitlement to benefit would receive, if its income rose from £100 to £120, a benefit increase of £2·12 a week. Those getting what seems like a windfall increase from £100 to £150 a week would have a real increase in income of less than £7 a week out of £50. They are incredible marginal rates compared to those for top earners. What does the Minister propose to do to give a real incentive to those low-paid people who are so hard hit by the system as it stands?

Mr. Newton: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman extend his researches from the unemployment trap, which started these exchanges, to the poverty trap, which is the result of the high marginal deduction rates to which he referred. There, too, he will find that, because of the changes that we have made, the numbers of people subject to the highest marginal deduction rate—80 per cent. and above—have been drastically reduced.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Guildford and Woolwich Bombings

29. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects Sir John May to complete his inquiry with the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings case.

30. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects Sir John May to complete his inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings case.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Sir John May's inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich case extends to the Maguire convictions. He is expected to resume his inquiry into this aspect once the Maguire appeal is decided. He cannot complete his investigation of the circumstances surrounding the convictions of the Guildford and Woolwich defendants until criminal proceedings against members of the Surrey police force have been concluded.

Mr. Banks: Is it not a fact that the Birmingham and Guildford stitch-ups have done great damage to the concept of British justice? The people want someone brought to account for those perversions of justice. We are talking not about humble coppers at the bottom, but about the people right at the top. Will the Attorney-General give a guarantee that if Sir John May's inquiries point the finger at Lords Havers, Donaldson and Roskill, he will not nobble Sir John May?

The Attorney-General: I regret the language with which the hon. Gentleman referred to cases which are now sub judice. He said that the British people are anxious to get justice. That will be done according to the rules and not to prejudged statements, which are not helpful. Last week, the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall police delivered a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. As I said in my earlier answer, proceedings are now in train against certain former members of the Surrey police regarding the Guildford case.

Mr. Cohen: It is not a matter of language but of people being imprisoned falsely and of the people who did that having a cover-up in their favour. Will the Attorney-General confirm that the original convictions were based on false confessions and phoney forensic evidence? Have not the Government and other influential figures within the state been keen for Sir John May's inquiry to be half-hearted and slowed down? Is not the reason for that the fact that many senior police and legal officers, including people in the DPP, knew right from the start of the case that innocent people had been convicted?

The Attorney-General: The Court of Appeal has allowed appeals in the Guildford and Woolwich cases, as well as in respect of the Birmingham matter. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can sensibly expect me to go beyond the words of the judgment of the Court of Appeal in each case. As for his remarks about the purpose of those

who set up Sir John May's inquiry, I can give an authoritative answer, as I was one of them. The answer is no.

Mr. Favell: Every conviction of an innocent person is a tragedy, not only for the person concerned but for his or her family and, of course, for the British judicial system. But it is also a tragedy when a person guilty of crimes as abhorrent as these gets away scot free. People worked hard to establish the innocence of those who were convicted. How much help has my right hon. and learned Friend received from these people to identify those who were guilty of the crimes?

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend said at the beginning of his question. Those who have had their appeals allowed in these circumstances are entitled to the presumption of innocence, as is everybody else in this country. Equally, of course, when very serious crimes go unpunished, that is a very serious matter, and very much against the interests of justice. My hon. Friend made his point in the concluding part of his question.

Mr. Hind: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many hon. Members, in their capacity as members of the British-Irish parliamentary body, have been to Dublin and had discussions with members of the Dail and senior Ministers in the Irish Government about the Birmingham, Guildford and Woolwich cases? The Irish authorities are more than happy about the result and recognise the strength of the British legal system in its ability to rectify mistakes, regrettable as they are. It is a credit to the system that that has been achieved.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, I know, takes a close interest in these matters. I have close contact with Dublin—particularly with my opposite number—and I know that there is ready appreciation there of the fact that the judicial system in this country led to the overturning of these convictions. There is also very ready understanding of the fact that all criminal justice systems depend upon the quality of the evidence that is presented.

Mr. John Morris: Will the Attorney-General confirm that, despite Sir John May's membership of the royal commission, the Government expect him to move swiftly to establish the facts and to report as quickly as possible? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure the House that Sir John's report on the facts will not be subsumed in the royal commission's inquiry into wider policy or procedural questions? Can the Attorney-General say when the trial of the three police officers will take place? Can he assure the House that those trials will not be unduly delayed and that, in respect of those aspects of Sir John's inquiry, there are no other complications and that we can expect interim reports?

The Attorney-General: I am glad that Sir John May has agreed to serve on the royal commission. There is very widespread admiration for the quality of the work of his inquiry so far. The appointment of the royal commission will not preclude a very full inquiry by Sir John into the Guildford, Woolwich and Maguire matters. I cannot say when prosecutions, if any, will take place, but no one is the slightest bit anxious to delay any matter of this kind.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

31. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received concerning the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have received correspondence from one member of the public about this case since the Court of Appeal delivered its judgment.

Mr. McFall: Does the Attorney-General realise that, in 1975, the trial judge Lord Bridge, said that if the Birmingham Six were telling the truth, the police were involved in one of the greatest conspiracies in the annals of history? At the Appeal Court two months ago, it was stated that 14 police officers lied or their evidence was unreliable. One of the police officers is a superintendent in the complaints department of West Midlands police. When will the Attorney-General take action so that the criminal justice system can be seen to be upright and clean, and British justice can hold its head up high?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman must have missed what I said a few minutes ago. Last week, the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall police delivered a report on the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Industrial Espionage

32. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss prosecution policy in cases of industrial espionage.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): English law contains no specific offence of industrial espionage, but those engaging in such conduct may incur criminal liability, depending on the circumstances. The decision whether to prosecute in any particular case is taken in accordance with the code for crown prosecutors.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Attorney-General discussed with the Director of Public Prosecutions the case of Mr. Gordon Layton of National Car Parks and of Jane Turpin of KAS, a security company, and the allegations made about their activities? They are alleged to have committed industrial espionage and to have stolen documents. Will there be a prosecution in that case?

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and I do not make public our discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, on the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, investigations are continuing but a report has not yet been received by the director.

Mr. David Martin: When and if my right hon. and learned Friend has an opportunity to raise with the Director of Public Prosecutions matters of industrial espionage, will he also see whether action can be taken against the perpetrators of notoriously false literature that circulated at a recent by-election? Should not the matter be investigated urgently before the perpetrators have a chance to flee the country?

The Solicitor-General: I think that I have already heard the Opposition make a statement from the dock on "Today" this morning.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Brazil

36. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Minister for Overseas Development to Brazil.

40. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the visit to Brazil by the Minister for Overseas Development.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): My second visit provided an important opportunity to see the environmental projects under our bilateral programme, and to discuss further co-operation with key Brazilian Ministers, scientists and institutions. Together with the Minister for Environment, I attended the special environment seminar hosted by President Collor and HRH The Prince of Wales. This is helping to advance preparations for the United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio in 1992.

Mr. Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and the Environment Committee that the perception of those issues, the resources and technical expertise matter, and that it is no excuse to cut overseas aid to the third world when things go wrong?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right, but the Governments of the tropical states need to ensure that their perceptions of what is going on are up to date with the issues. Donors can help with resources and technical expertise, and we shall definitely do so.

Mr. Arbuthnot: What help can donors give, and what help is the United Kingdom giving, to combat the growing urban problems in Brazil, such as the drift to the cities, slums and drug taking, which affect a quarter of all children in Brazil?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. That is a major issue. By the year 2000, 75 per cent. of the populations in Latin America and the Caribbean will be urban dwellers. We are giving them help in Olinda in Brazil and are exploring urban environmental management projects in Sao Paulo, and we have projects to help street children through the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and Oxfam.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the right hon. Lady's visit confirm her belief that before the House of Commons goes into recess, it should debate the well-researched Select Committee on the Environment report on the rain forests? I am not a member of that Committee, but I feel that our colleagues have done an excellent job and that the report should be debated. On the right hon. Lady's letter of 17 April to me, what further possibilities does she foresee for the work of Salati and Lutzenberger?

Mrs. Chalker: I shall bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate. As for my letter of 17 April, I have no more to report at present.

Dr. Kim Howells: Will the Minister say something about the problems that have beset many of the communities in Amazonia, where many of the laudable projects presently supported by the Government are taking place and where there is open abuse of human rights, including murder and torture? Will she give an undertaking to the House that the next time she meets the Brazilian authorities she will tell them that the money that this country donates to research projects in Brazil will very much depend on Brazil's human rights record and that this country will take measures designed to wipe out those barbaric practices?

Mrs. Chalker: I am well aware of what the hon. Gentleman says. I have already raised those issues with Brazilian Ministers, and shall do so again if necessary.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My right hon. Friend will be aware that tropical rain forests contain many seeds and other products of great medicinal value, about which science is often as yet unaware. Bearing in mind that this country has Kew gardens and other institutes of worldwide renown, what assistance is it giving to the Brazilians to remove from the tropical rain forests, without damaging them, those products of great value which yield resources for the people in those districts?

Mrs. Chalker: We have approved a host of environmental projects, including those related to aromatic plant development and flood plain ecology and managements. I can assure my hon. Friend that, in all our work, we seek to develop the whole bio-diversity of the forests, not just trees.

Foreign Students

37. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of foreign postgraduate students who study in British universities helped by Her Majesty's Government grants.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1990-91, Her Majesty's Government supported approximately 25,000 overseas students studying in the United Kingdom at a cost of £143 million. About 44 per cent.—11,000 students—were from non-Commonwealth countries. The majority of awards were at postgraduate level. We expect to maintain that level in the current year.

Mr. Wray: When Ministers appeared before the House of Lords Select Committee in 1989, it showed some concern at the dwindling numbers. Will the Minister assure us, as she assured the Select Committee, that the Government will be giving more aid to organisations?

Mrs. Chalker: I am not sure to which figures the hon. Gentleman refers, but in each category of scholarship—the ODA, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Council, Department of Education and Science and Department of Trade and Industry—the numbers have risen during the past five years, and I see no reason why that should change.

Mr. Wells: Do my right hon. Friend's figures include the excellent Institute of Development Studies, which many postgraduate students have attended, which has established a world-renowned reputation and which the ODA supports to a considerable extent from its budget?

Mrs. Chalker: The short answer is yes, and many other good institutions besides.

Sir David Steel: Does the Minister acknowledge that during the past decade there has been a regrettable shift away from students from poorer overseas countries towards richer countries such as those in north America and the middle east? If that is true of the undergraduate population, is it also true of the postgraduate population?

Mrs. Chalker: We believe that the undergraduate population should best be helped within its own countries and that more specialised training, which can rarely be afforded overseas, should be given in this country. That is why there are more postgraduate students here than there were some years ago, but fewer undergraduate students, who can benefit from the courses and technical co-operation that we give recipient countries through our aid programme.

Disaster Relief

39. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision has been made for disaster relief in the ODA budget for this year.

Mrs. Chalker: From within the existing aid budget for this financial year I have already allocated £94·5 million. On 29 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a further £30 million addition to the aid budget.

Today, I am pleased to announce a further £30 million addition to the aid budget to be used for humanitarian relief in Africa and Bangladesh. I now look to other donors to follow our lead.

Mr. Campell-Savours: Perhaps I can be forgiven for asking the following question because you, Mr. Speaker, will know why I am asking it. Does the Minister have time to argue for moneys from the Treasury given that Mr. Andrew M. Smith, her former personal assistant, stated that it was impossible for the Minister to do a proper job for her own constituents?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman is making a very snide point. The prospective parliamentary candidate for Cynon Valley asked questions about the time that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) spent in her constituency. I have made it clear that I spend every weekend that I can in my constituency, and I will continue to do so. I will not let the hon. Gentleman's remarks detract from the £30 million extra, making £60 million extra for the aid budget in the first two months of this financial year.

Mr. Wilshire: I have spent part of this morning at the warehouse at Heathrow airport which Heathrow Airport Ltd. has made available free of charge for storing clothes that are to go to Kurdistan. I know that my right hon. Friend is well aware of the tremendous job being done there. Is she aware that that warehouse is now full because of a lack of flights to get the donated goods to Iraq? Will she, therefore, meet me and others to see whether it is possible to make more arrangements for more mercy flights?

Mrs. Chalker: I am well aware of what my hon. Friend says. It has been somewhat difficult with some of the clothing and other donations because they were not acceptable to the recipient Governments. We have done all that we can—and will continue to do so—to get relief supplies through as they are needed. I will, of course, meet my hon. Friend. However, the system on the whole is working well when the countries will accept the goods that have been donated.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister believe that economic circumstances now permit an increase in the overseas aid budget to 0·7 per cent. of gross national product, which is the United Nations target?

Mrs. Chalker: I am interested to note that the shadow Treasury Minister, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), said yesterday on television:

"0·7 per cent. is a goal and that we will do our best to meet it as resources allow."

I find that rather at variance with what the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) is saying. As the shadow Treasury Minister replied that the interviewer was nitpicking, I must respond by saying that I do not think that an increase of £2,000 million, however worthy the cause, is nitpicking.

Further and Higher Education

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for education for all young people over the age of 16.

More young people than ever before are taking up education and training opportunities. Six out of 10 16-year-olds stayed on in full-time education last autumn compared with four out of 10 in 1979. Three out of four 17-year-olds are in education or training today compared with two out of four 10 years ago. One in five 18 and 19-year-olds now continue into higher education compared with one in eight 10 years ago. More adults are also taking advantage of the educational opportunities available. All 16 and 17-year-olds in this country have a guarantee of a place in full-time education or training if they choose to take advantage of it. We secure places for all those who wish to go on into higher education and who are suitably qualified.

We need to build on those achievements. That means developing more vocational qualifications of a standard that will win equal esteem with the best academic qualifications. It means giving schools, colleges and universities the institutional freedom and the necessary incentives to develop and respond to the demands of young people and of employers. The Government are setting themselves the aim of achieving mass participation in higher education, further education and training, while maintaining and enhancing present high standards.

The Government's proposals are contained in three White Papers which are being published today. The necessary legislation to implement the proposals will be brought before the House in due course.

I refer first to the White Paper entitled "Education and Training for the 21st Century" which I present to Parliament with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Wales. That sets out new policies for education and training after compulsory school age. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will describe the new training policies in a further statement to the House in a few moments, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is presenting his proposals in a separate White Paper.

The White Paper sets out in detail the Government's proposals for further education colleges and sixth-form colleges. As I announced to the House on 21 March, we intend that those colleges will become autonomous institutions outside local authority control.

The colleges will be funded by national Further Education Councils in England and in Wales. They will receive each year a core budget plus additional funds according to the actual number of students enrolled. In that way they will have a powerful incentive to recruit and retain additional students, both young people and adults. The councils will not manage the colleges. They will follow the model of the funding council that has so successfully steered the remarkable growth of the polytechnics after we freed them from the control of local government.

Vocational qualifications have for too long been misunderstood and undervalued in this country. The White Paper sets out how the introduction of a clear structure of national vocational qualifications can be accelerated. The range of qualifications will meet the needs of students of all abilities. At level 3, they will be set at a high standard equivalent to A-levels.

A-levels are successful and well-respected examinations, which are being taken by steadily increasing numbers of pupils. I am determined to see them maintained and to control their development so that their high standard is preserved. I am writing today to the School Examinations and Assessment Council, setting out my views on the principles that should govern the development of A-level and AS-level examinations. Those principles are designed to ensure consistency of standards between AS-levels and A-levels and to provide a framework for increasing numbers of young people to pursue courses of academic study that can be broadened by increasing the take-up of AS-level examinations. A copy of my letter to SEAC has been placed in the Library of the House.

A-level and AS-level courses are not the only route to excellence and to higher education. We must do more to promote understanding among students, employers and higher education institutions of the value and quality of national vocational qualifications at equivalent standard. The Government have therefore decided to introduce new diplomas at advanced and ordinary levels. The advanced diploma will be awarded to students taking AS-levels and A-levels, to students gaining vocational qualifications of the same standard, and to students taking a mixture of the two. I intend to consult on the details later this summer.

The White Paper describes two further measures that are directed at schools. First, the Government intend to legislate to adjust the school leaving date. At present some 16-year-olds are able to leave school legally at Easter, before completing key stage 4 of the national curriculum and before their GCSE examinations. We shall introduce legislation to require all pupils to complete their studies at the end of the summer term. That will ensure that all pupils will have their level of attainment at the end of their compulsory education properly assessed.

Secondly, I believe that we should allow both schools and colleges of all kinds to broaden the range of courses and opportunities that they offer. The White Paper therefore announces the intention to introduce legislation that would enable school sixth forms to admit part-time students and adults. The main work of sixth forms will continue to be for young people studying full-time, but they will have greater freedom to take on other students if they wish and if there is room.

In higher education, we need to build on the successes of recent years. The academics in our universities may sometimes grumble, I know, but they are to be congratulated on their progress in expanding access to more students in recent years while maintaining the best academic standards in the developed world. The polytechnics and colleges, freed from the control of local authorities, have also demonstrated that rapid expansion and improvements in quality can go hand in hand. The Government congratulate the polytechnics and colleges on what they have achieved, particularly in widening access to higher education and in developing vocational courses. The formal distinctions between universities on the one hand and polytechnics and colleges on the other, known as the binary line, have, in my opinion, now become an

obstacle to further progress. The Government propose to abolish those distinctions and establish a single framework for higher education.

With my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, I am presenting to Parliament today a White Paper setting out the main features of our proposals for higher education.

First, we shall establish a single funding structure for universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education. In order to reflect particular needs in Scotland and Wales, there will be separate Higher Education Funding Councils in England, Scotland and Wales to distribute public funds for both teaching and research. New links will be established to continue the present close relationship with Northern Ireland's existing unitary structure.

Secondly, the Council for National Academic Awards has successfully brought the polytechnics and other major institutions to a position where they can offer degrees under their own quality control arrangements equal in standard to those offered by the universities. We propose therefore to extend degree-awarding powers to polytechnics and major institutions and to wind up the Council for National Academic Awards. We shall, however, look to universities, polytechnics and colleges to develop their own new quality audit arrangements on a United Kingdom-wide basis. We shall also require the Higher Education Funding Councils to establish quality assessment units to advise the councils on the relative quality of teaching and learning across institutions so that those judgments of quality can inform the distribution of public funding.

Thirdly, we shall extend the title of university to those polytechnics that wish to use it. It is our firm intention, nevertheless, that the present distinctive features of the polytechnics, with their particular emphasis on links with industry, vocational degree and sub-degree courses, and applied research, should be retained.

The Government believe that this new framework will provide for an expanding, thriving and diverse system of higher education in the United Kingdom. Our policies are designed to ensure that higher education continues to expand efficiently alongside improvements in quality. When we came into office only one in eight of the relevant age group went into higher education. Now it is one in five. By the end of this decade, we confidently expect one in three of all our young people to benefit from higher education of our traditional high quality.

I feel privileged to present these two White Papers to the House this afternoon. They will transform post-school education and training. They will enhance the esteem of vocational education. They will benefit ever-larger numbers of students, from all backgrounds and at all levels. Our policies pave the way for a better society and greater economic success. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Despite all the public relations hype surrounding the publication of these White Papers, close examination of the statements will show that the Government are running out of ideas as quickly as they are running out of time. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a great deal of work to do today.

Mr. Straw: We welcome the change in the school-leaving dates, for which we called in 1980, the change to allow part-time sixth formers to continue their education in sixth forms and, particularly, the establishment of a single funding council for higher education, which has been Labour policy for years and which Ministers voted down three years ago.

The Secretary of State has just confirmed the removal from local control of the 557 further education, tertiary and sixth-form colleges of England and Wales and their enforced transfer to centralised control from Whitehall. Is the Secretary of State aware of the enormous opposition that those plans have aroused within his own party? What is his response to the views of many local authority Conservative leaders, including Mr. Tim MacNamara, the leader of Hampshire county council, who said on Friday that the Secretary of State was

"hell bent on destroying local education authorities without any idea of what to put in its place";

who complained of the Secretary of State's "government by denigration", and who said these changes were blighting all planning of 16 to 19 education? Was not the same Mr. MacNamara correct to accuse the Secretary of State of acting "for wholly doctrinal reasons"? Is not the Secretary of State showing the same doctrinal prejudice that so infected his stewardship of the national health service and has so damaged the Conservative party's electoral chances?

Is the Secretary of State aware that only three years ago, by section 120 of the Education Reform Act 1988, the Government imposed new duties on local education authorities in respect of further education? Ministers then expressed

"great confidence that local authorities will fulfil their duty to promote further education."—[*Official Report*, 24 March 1988; Vol. 130, c. 551-52.]

They spoke of the need for strategic planning for further education by LEAs. What has happened since then to justify these changes? With 60 per cent. of 16-plus provision transferred to central control, leaving 40 per cent. in local authority sixth forms, who will now plan the system—or is it all to be left to some kind of bogus market?

The Secretary of State said that he was setting some aim for improvement in higher education. Where are the targets against which the seriousness of the Government's commitment can be judged? The Labour party has set clear targets for improving the system. Where are the Conservatives' targets?

The central problem of 16-plus education and training is the academic and vocational divide, with outdated A-levels on one side and a jungle of vocational qualifications on the other. By his statement the Secretary of State has conceded our argument, but produced a wholly incoherent solution to the problem. Is he not aware of the weight of opinion against unreformed A-levels, from the Confederation of British Industry, from the Institute of Physics, from the vice-chancellors and from the Government's own Advisory Council on Science and Technology, and of the overwhelming weight of opinion in favour of Labour's alternative—an integrated advanced certificate of education and training?

Does the Secretary of State understand that he is reinforcing and perpetuating a divided system? Because A-levels and the new vocational qualifications will have different content, structure and assessment, young people can continue to be trapped in either a vocational or an academic route.

How is the new diploma to work? What will it cover? Will it be instead of A-levels or will it run parallel to them?

[Mr. Straw]

As I said, we welcome the Government's belated recognition of the strength of the case that the Labour party has advocated for years: to end the binary divide, to have a joint funding council for higher education and to achieve parity of esteem between universities and polytechnics, which were a creation of the Labour Government in 1967. However, the Secretary of State ducks key issues. Will access to higher education depend, as Labour believes that it should, on the ability to benefit or will the Government make it further dependent on the ability to pay?

Will the Secretary of State scrap the discredited student loans scheme or does he expect students to go deeper and deeper into debt? Does he have any plans to review the operation of the scheme? Will he categorically rule out top-up fees as a means of financing expansion?

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an assurance that the proposed quality body will be controlled neither by the Government nor by a cartel of institutions, but will be genuinely independent so as most effectively to safeguard quality and academic freedom?

The Secretary of State sought to pretend that Britain's record on education and training is far better than it is. Has he forgotten that just seven weeks ago, in this House, at that Dispatch Box, he admitted that

"we still lag behind our competitors in the participation of our school leavers in further education and training, and their achievement of useful qualifications"?—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 432.]

Has he forgotten that the former Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), said at a Carlton club seminar that the low stay-on rate in full-time education and training showed Britain to be lagging

"dramatically behind other advanced countries"?

This failure has been built upon a lack of commitment, a lack of funding and a lack of clarity of thinking by the Government. The policies announced today are the product of a Government lacking imagination and ambition for our young people, and motivated by prejudice. In no way can the causes of Britain's failures over the past 12 years suddenly become the midwives of success.

Three years ago the Government told us that they had new policies for education. Now they have come back for another start, but the only fresh start for the nation will be a Labour Government who know what they want for our young people and who have the policies and ambitions to put Britain back into the first division of highly trained and highly educated nations.

Mr. Clarke: I am genuinely disappointed that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) could not think of better questions in response to a package of measures that will completely change the framework of vocational and academic qualifications for our 16 to 19-year-olds. We propose a whole new structure for vocational and academic education in further education and sixth-form colleges, and our proposals will change the institutional arrangements for higher education.

The hon. Member for Blackburn says that the Government have run out of ideas. His response to my statement shows that his party has no ideas at all on education or on any of the other public services. The hon. Gentleman touched on what I had already announced—the establishment of autonomous further education and sixth-form colleges that will be independent of local government—and he was reduced to quoting Mr. MacNamara of Hampshire to justify his party's present position. He says that there is widespread opposition in my party to that proposal. There is not even very much opposition in his party to my proposal. When I first announced to the House our change in policy the hon. Gentleman did not know whether he was in favour or against, just as he did not know and still does not know whether he is in favour or against the pay review body settling the pay of teachers.

The hon. Member for Blackburn asked why we are determined to pursue this new autonomous status for further education colleges and sixth-form colleges. He should look to the experience of the polytechnics for which we took the same step three or four years ago. It was a deserved success. The hon. Gentleman is not against that and should not be against this proposal either. That was all that the hon. Gentleman had to say about further education colleges and sixth-form colleges.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about qualifications for people aged from 16 to 18, and again advanced Labour's proposals for an integrated alternative to what we suggest. Labour's approach to increased participation by 16 to 19-year-olds is to produce one broad pattern of qualification for every person and then to set the achievement at such a low level that most people appear to reach it. That is no basis for entering higher education or for raising the standards of eduction or the training of our young people for future employment. We are similarly aiming for much wider participation, while preserving what is best in the existing A-level structure and allowing it to evolve within the principles that I have recommended to SEAC. We are also putting alongside it vocational qualifications of the same quality that will deserve equal esteem.

We are aiming for mass participation in higher education and training, but we shall preserve the important standards that Labour would destroy. People have a clear choice and Labour's alternative should be rejected. I see that the hon. Gentleman's junior shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), nods in agreement when I say that everybody to the age of 16 should take exactly the same basic qualification within whatever they are able to attain.

I think that most people recognise that, to a minor extent from the age of 14, and certainly from the age of 16, people have different aptitudes, abilities and interests in careers. All those abilities must be harnessed. The hundreds of thousands taking A-levels at the moment are good-quality entrants to any university system. We want a wider range of opportunities for other young people so that they can aspire to the same standards and have the same career opportunities and access to higher education.

When the hon. Member for Blackburn dropped his voice he seemed to agree with all my proposals on higher education, despite the fact that it is a fairly dramatic, I dare say radical, change to the institutional arrangements for universities and polytechnics.

The hon. Gentleman then tried to bring in a red herring about ability to pay. I hope that he will not lower the debate on this public service to the level to which it has been lowered on others. My right hon. Friends and I are committed to open access to higher education for everyone who has the ability and willingness to take advantage of it.

We shall not put financial obstacles in their way. The new loan system, coupled with the grant, gives this year's students access to 25 per cent. more support than they had a year ago.

We are opening up access to higher education to people of all backgrounds who are willing to take advantage of it. That we have succeeded in doing so is shown by the increase from the one in eight participation of a decade ago to the one in five now. Our target is that one in three of our young people will go into higher education by the end of the decade. Their admission will be determined by their ability, and by their aptitude in applying themselves to their work, not in any way by their means. We have the ideas for making that expansion in quality. The hon. Gentleman should have the nerve whole-heartedly to support it, because he has no alternative proposals of his own.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that there is another important statement after this one, and I have to balance the right and the desire of hon. Members to participate in questions on the statements with those of the 13 hon. Members who have already shown that they wish to speak in the debate on next steps in the civil service. I shall allow questions on this statement to continue until 4.20 pm, and we shall then move on to the next statement. It would only be fair to move on to the debate by 5 pm.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is not one of the most important and significant issues in my right hon. and learned Friend's statement the fact that we are drawing together the blue and the white-collar workers, as polytechnics will now, quite rightly, have the same status as universities so that those who go to polytechnics will be able to gain real qualifications that will allow them to have real jobs and take a real and lasting place in society? Is not this one of the best things that we can do?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and with his instinct that, in the past, the division that we have drawn between the blue-collar engineer and the white-collar lawyers was one of the great weaknesses of our education system and, to some extent, of our society as well. Our proposals put under one umbrella of the new diploma those qualifications for young people that are academic and those that are vocational. It puts under the same institutional arrangements the sixth-form colleges, which tend to be academic, and further education colleges, which tend to be vocational. It puts under the same arrangements the polytechnics, which have vocational links, and the universities, which have academic links. Our intention is not to make one homogeneous whole, ending all differences of approach and of admission, but to enable all people to choose between these various paths as they so wish. I hope that our best and brightest young people will take a mixture of vocational and academic courses and choose a combination of academic and career-oriented studies to get themselves to whatever career they wish to aspire to.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): In so far as much of what the Secretary of State announced today has long been Liberal Democrat policy, I welcome that. Much that he has announced is important and valuable. In so far as his proposals fall behind ours, we shall press for more. That includes reform of A-levels and local and democratic control. Every time that we have proposed policies that are closely in line with those that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has set out, the response from the Conservative Benches has been, "How do you pay for it? Where will the money come from? How much will it cost?" Let me ask the Secretary of State, "How will he pay for it? Where is the money coming from? How much will it cost? What has been put aside?" When will he be telling the House?

Mr. Clarke: I do not know what has come over the House today. Opposition parties seem not to want to oppose any more when we come forward with packages of this sort. I welcome the Liberal Democrats' endorsement of what I propose. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will shortly be dealing with other aspects of training policy, which are also part of the package, but we already have universities and polytechnics on a funding regime that responds to growth in student numbers. So the more successful the policy is, the more expensive it becomes to the taxpayer. Over the past two years, for example, there has been an increase of over 10 per cent. in the funds going into higher education. The increase in funding is largely in response to a successful expansion of the system. We propose to have a similar arrangement for the Further Education Councils. Part of the funding—basic funding—will be part linked to student numbers. As I have said, there is direct linkage between the funding that goes into the system and growth.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: How much?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There is no Treasury approval for a blank cheque.

Mr. Clarke: Well, if we achieve the growth that we are aiming at, funding will increase roughly in line with that growth. We are set on a course considerably to increase real-terms funding in these areas. If our policies are as successful as I believe that they will be in stimulating greater access to further education and higher education, further demands on public funding will follow directly, really, from the arrangements that we are proposing.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will my right hon. and learned Friend ignore the ill-founded whingeing of Opposition Members? How the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) could describe my right hon. and learned Friend's statement as unimaginative and lacking new ideas beggars the imagination. My right hon. and learned Friend has presented one of the most comprehensive education statements that we have ever listened to in this place.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that what he has said about sixth forms, training places and the maintenance of quality of A-levels will be richly applauded in the House and outside? His statement on the abolition of the binary line that separates universities and polytechnics will similarly be warmly welcomed. All in all, the statement builds on the success of the past 12 years.

Mr. Clarke: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend. The hon. Member for Blackburn accused me of educational vandalism this morning before he knew what I was going to announce. He rather toned down his remarks when he heard my pronouncements; we should be grateful for small mercies.

[Mr. Clarke]

I agree with my hon. Friend that the announcements that I have made on behalf of the Government will be widely welcomed by all those, whom he knows so well, in further education colleges, in the sixth-form world and in higher education. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): May I welcome the underlying assumption that there will be an expansion of tertiary education? My Conservative opponent fought the 1987 general election on the basis that to set up tertiary colleges in the borough in my constituency was a grave mistake and that tertiary colleges were a mistake. The part of south Leeds that I represent needs a sixth-form college, and it very much needs a tertiary college. Whom do I go to? I cannot go to Leeds city council, because it does not have tertiary institutions. It has normal sixth forms that remain under its control. I cannot go to a funding council, because it will be some time before one is established. Will I be able to press the claims of south Leeds on the Secretary of State? We need money for a sixth-form college. It is vital that we have such a college, and I ask the Secretary of State whether he is now the responsible person.

Mr. Clarke: I dare say that the controversy in Leeds in 1987 was centred on whether to close school sixth forms and go for tertiary colleges. Some local authorities did that, while others kept all their sixth forms. Other local authorities had a mixture. That follows from local authority control. At present, the right hon. Gentleman must pursue Leeds city council, which is responsible for the schools and colleges in its area. If the hon. Member for Blackburn had his way, that would continue to be so for all time. That would mean that everyone in the part of south Leeds that the right hon. Gentleman represents would have to take whatever Leeds city council thought was right for him by way of a structure. I should prefer to see an arrangement whereby individual pupils and parents had the chance of access to a further education college, a sixth-form college, a tertiary college, which combines the two, or a school sixth form. Such a system would respond much more to demands and would ensure that the widest possible range of options was open to pupils.

The existing institutions will be given autonomy. The new Further Education Councils will be responsible for responding to demand and ensuring that there is an adequate provision of places for all young people wanting access to further education throughout the country. We must legislate before we can set up the councils, and no doubt the Labour party will oppose their establishment if it follows the line taken today by the hon. Member for Blackburn. In the meantime, I can only advise the right hon. Gentleman to continue to put his views to Leeds city council.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, West): I strongly support my right hon. and learned Friend in restating the Robbins principle that everyone who is capable of benefiting from higher education should have access to it. As to the changes affecting colleges of further education, will local education authorities have any role to play in the future development of those colleges' curriculums?

Mr. Clarke: We are restating the Robbins principle, and I am glad that my hon. Friend thinks that we are right to do so. Experience since those proposals were made all those years ago shows that access to higher education can be expanded at a considerable rate without damaging the academic standards that institutions achieve. Our policy reaffirms the Robbins principle by encouraging expansion, to provide higher education for the maximum number of young people while maintaining standards. Labour's policy is to expand but never mind the standards, because it might be too difficult to go in that direction.

Until we establish the new councils, local authorities will remain wholly responsible for further and sixth-form education in their areas. Thereafter, they can make their contribution, along with all other interested bodies, to the debate that will no doubt continue about the evolution of the contents of our new diploma and the nature of A-levels and national vocational qualifications—NVQs. However, those will largely be determined by the School Examinations and Assessment Council, in respect of examinations and assessments, and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, which will be answerable to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, in respect of NVQs.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Secretary of State accept the congratulations of my hon. Friends on these Benches on the Government's decision to establish the Higher Education Funding Councils? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that some members of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts advanced such a proposal in the early 1980s? It is good to see the Government at last taking their advice.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the budget for the university of Wales will in future form part of the Welsh Office budget and will be distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council in Wales?

We welcome also the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal to open up the sixth form as part of adult continuing education. Will the Secretary of State expand on those parts of the White Paper that refer specifically to adult education and comment also on the status of the Open university? Does the fact that it will in future be part of the funding mechanism for England mean that its remit will be in any way reduced in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland?

Mr. Clarke: When I announced the teachers' pay review body, the only unqualified support that I received, without any mealy-mouthed words, came from the Welsh nationalist spokesman. I am grateful that we again appear to be in total agreement. That has made me so sympathetic towards Welsh aspirations for individualism that I can confirm that the funding of Welsh higher education and further education will in future be wholly the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. As I said, there will be a separate council for funding in Wales.

I have announced that the Open university will come within the proposed funding arrangements for universities and polytechnics as a whole. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that that will not reduce the Open university's commitment in either Wales or Scotland—and it is extremely important that it should not do so.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister accept my congratulations on grasping the nettle of post-16 education and on extending vocational opportunities in a way that does not downgrade academic values? Is my right hon. and learned Friend struck, as I am, by the fact that while the Government have in the past few weeks been giving teachers a better pay deal and extending opportunities for those aged over 16, the Opposition have been calling for the demolition of A-levels and of grant-maintained schools, to be replaced by an anti-intellectual, egalitarian mush?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support of a package of measures that has indeed been driven on by the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to educational policy. I am not surprised at Labour's attitude, because the only ideas it appears to have are to impose an egalitarian mush in respect of qualifications and to defend local government bureaucracy and control of every aspect of the education system, and the teachers' right to strike. That seems to me to be the sum total of Labour's education policies.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that his cantankerous reference to grumbling university lecturers is reminiscent of a briefing that the Department issued before Christmas, which claimed that there was no need to increase university lecturers' salaries by very much because there is no shortage of applicants for university posts? When will the Government recognise that our education system needs universities that house departments which are centres of excellence, and that that can be achieved only if they are able to recruit and retain some of the most gifted people in our society? Is it not clear that those changes in administration will fail until the Government recognise that they have to spend more money per student as well as increasing the number of students, which requires a lot more money to be spent on higher education?

Mr. Clarke: I deliberately included in my statement a sentence that congratulated university academics on what they have achieved in recent years, in expanding the number of students, maintaining quality and keeping down unit costs. Because I realised that some university academics might wince at my saying that straightforwardly, I conceded that they have some grumbles. If the hon. Gentleman reads my statement, he will realise that I was congratulating the universities on what they have achieved. This year, the finance of universities has increased by about 10 per cent. Of course they have other non-pay matters to settle, but I am satisfied that, with reasonable discussions, they can make proper provision for their staff this year. It is up to them to negotiate with the Association of University Teachers and perhaps to face up to the fact that some universities are quite well placed and will make a reasonable pay award this year, whereas others are in difficulties and might need to be more restrained. That is a matter for them and not for me. I accept that there are obviously resource implications and we have been putting in the resources as universities have expanded. I do not accept that unit costs should increase, as the hon. Gentleman said. The need for efficiency in the use of public money, to deliver the policy objectives that I have outlined, is as important in higher education as it is in every other aspect of education.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that this statement will be welcomed widely because we are preserving academic excellence in A-levels, which give us the shortest university degree course of a legitimate standard in the world, while expanding vocational education, where we have been behind our competitors? There is no doubt that the balance of those two will be fruitful for the future of this country.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, with all his expertise on this subject. I agree that our higher education system is one of the best in the world and that a higher proportion of our young people obtain good degrees under that system than in almost any other country in the developed world, and that we must maintain that. We must get right the balance that he has described. Our proposals get that balance right and those of our opponents' would destroy it.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): May I give not a grudging but a warm welcome to the decision to set up a separate Higher Education Funding Council for Scotland and to place the Scottish universities under the responsibility of the Scottish Office, which represents a significant conversion by the Conservative party to policies that some of us have argued for more than 20 years? May I raise with him paragraph 48 of the higher education White Paper which seems to recognise the different structure of education in Scotland? Does that mean that the Secretary of State for Scotland will be able to vary or abolish the student loans system, which is having an adverse effect on the four-year honours degree course in Scotland?

Mr. Clarke: I always say to those on the nationalist Benches, whether I am disowning responsibility on questions on Welsh or Scottish schools or whatever, that we have a devolved system of government in this country. It is true that we have taken a further step, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will have separate funding arrangements for higher education, as he already has for further education. Nevertheless, the student loan scheme is a United Kingdom system. The Student Loans Company has its headquarters in Glasgow and I recently visited the city to see it. It would not be open to my right hon. Friend to depart from that system, unless he introduced separate legislation. We both believe that the student loan scheme is a big improvement on financial support for students in this country and we have no intention of going back on it.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is it not self-evident that any large-scale expansion of higher education has to be based on plurality, and is not a degree of co-ordination needed, which has been lacking before? Is not the approach that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced today much more sensible than trying to force people down one particular path which is simply a mish-mash of everything?

Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that under the system that he has announced, which I applaud, there are sufficient arrangements for people who want to change courses in mid-stream?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. As we design the components of the new advanced diploma—A-levels and AS-levels, or NVQs, or a mixture of the two—we should leave room for those

[Mr. Clarke]

who, after 16, decide that they have made a mistake and want to change courses. In my letter to SEAC, and in our proposals, we have encouraged credit transfer, credit accumulation and modular approaches to courses if they can sensibly be developed without compromising the essential qualities of A-levels or a distinctive NVQ. In my letter, I have asked SEAC to do further work on that matter. We need to make room for 16 or 17-year-olds who decide to change courses because they made a mistaken choice after statutory school age.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): No hon. Member would deny that the more controversial parts of the Secretary of State's statement are imaginative. However, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that, although they may be imaginative, the real test will come in a few years when we ascertain whether they are intelligent? Does he think it intelligent that a common thread of criticism of the role of education authorities ran through his statement? Whether they are Labour or Conservative controlled is immaterial.

Does the Secretary of State think that his hon. Friends' echoes of derision for the role of local authorities—even those with Conservative leaders—are reasonable? Does he accept that his policies will still depend on the co-operation of local authorities, which he clearly despises?

Mr. Clarke: I was accused by the hon. Member for Blackburn of failing to introduce imaginative proposals. What matters is not attitudes but that the policies are practical and sensible and will expand opportunities for many young people.

My remarks about local authority control are not pointless criticisms of local government but build on our experience of removing polytechnics from local government control. In many areas, local government is changing to an enabling role and away from the day-to-day, detailed management of countless different services. That is a wider issue, but there is no doubt that, in further and higher education, the governing bodies of each polytechnic—most of which will become universities—further education colleges and sixth-form colleges, as autonomous bodies, can make a better job of judging priorities, managing the institutions and expanding in response to local demands than local government did in the past.

We are moving to a new system whereby we shall turn our backs on bureaucracy and rely more on local initiatives and enthusiasm in the management of individual institutions. We believe that that delivers better and more responsive public services.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the standards of A-levels will be maintained and, where necessary, strengthened? Conservative Members do not want to fall into the same trap as the Labour party, which condemns excellence, supports the erosion of the A-level system and promotes its total abolition.

Mr. Clarke: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. To those who say that the course of study at A-level should be broadened, we reaffirm that we shall continue, as we are successfully doing now, to encourage more AS-levels—subjects that are taken to the same standard as A-level, but cover half the range. Two A-levels and two AS-levels can be taken by someone who might find three A-levels too narrow. In that way, we shall maintain standards and achieve the same high-quality entry to our universities, as I am sure the young men and women now sitting their A-levels will provide when they go to university next year.

It would be a disaster to approach that system in a way that damaged academic standards. Few higher education establishments in the world would not envy the intake from our sixth forms and colleges. Those students achieve good-quality A-levels after two years of rigorous study.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does not the Secretary of State understand that the biggest barriers to young people and adults attending full-time or, especially, part-time courses for A-levels or similar qualifications necessary for university entrance are the lack of funds provided to local education authorities, the disparity between different parts of the country in the payment of discretionary grants and the inability of young people to obtain income support from the Department of Social Security? They are the biggest barriers to expanding further education for academically qualified youngsters, capable though they may be. What will the proposals in the statement do about that?

Mr. Clarke: The argument that growth is being restrained by the Government's lack of funding is best answered by the figures. I have already mentioned that one in five 18 and 19-year-olds are in higher education compared with one in eight 10 years ago. Six out of 10 16-year-olds now stay on at school compared with four out of 10 when the Government came into office, and three out of four 17-year-olds receive education and training compared with two out of four when we came to office.

The hon. Gentleman must bear it in mind that the background is already one of sustained expansion of academic, educational and training opportunities. The evidence belies his claim that the Government are starving the system of funds so that access is restrained. By our deeds, one should judge us. We have expanded opportunities rapidly and we shall do so yet further.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that my constituents will welcome the statement? Does he recall that the Labour-controlled council tried to abolish sixth forms in my constituency, which led directly to a 6 per cent. swing to the Conservatives in the most recent local elections? Will my right hon. and learned Friend find a way of short-circuiting money to those sixth forms and especially around those councils that have used their financial mismanagement to starve them of funds?

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted that my hon. Friend defends the popular sixth forms in his constituency. Already, under the arrangements that we tend to approve, sixth forms are treated attractively. We aim to ensure that good sixth forms in schools are protected and will continue to flourish provided that they respond to a real need in the local community. New ones should open when the local community so desires. I share my hon. Friend's opinion on the contrast that can be drawn between our approach of encouraging individual choice and allowing sixth forms to continue and that of those in the Labour party who sometimes wish a local bureaucracy to impose a pattern on the local community as it thinks best.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The Secretary of State will recognise the wide agreement on the need to improve the parity of esteem between academic and vocational subjects to break down the status divide that has bedevilled the English and Welsh education system.

Does the Secretary of State also understand that his response today will be seen as a lost opportunity, particularly on the qualification system he has proposed? All the evidence from the Government's Higginson report, the CBI, teachers' organisations and a wide range of institutions representing higher education demands changes in 18-plus education, but the Government have resisted the opportunity and missed the boat on this occasion. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has come up not with the radical change that is needed, but with an approach that will exacerbate the divide between the academic and the vocational. When the small print of the statement is understood by Consdervative hon. Members, they will fully realise that the new diploma is spatchcocked on to the existing jungle of qualifications.

The Government have let down a generation of young people. At the next election the Government will not have the opportunity of implementing their proposals but the Labour party will implement its proposals, which are in line with the qualification system's needs and will break down the divide by giving that system the radical approach it so desperately needs.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman cannot seriously argue that what we have announced today does not bridge the divide between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications. He and his hon. Friends think that that job cannot be done properly without scrapping A-levels. What we have announced certainly bridges the divide. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends believe that A-levels must be scrapped. They make the case that A-levels are elitist, that only 30 per cent. of pupils can do them. The Labour party and others suggest that there should be a much broader approach. But it is an approach that would take all pupils to a much lower standard. In the education world, there are people who say that, in those circumstances, a four-year degree course would be necessary to make up for the lack of attainment before entry to higher education. We are retaining the best of A-levels, and combining them with good-quality vocational qualifications, within one framework that will give them equal esteem. That is a very superior approach. The Labour party is driven by old shibboleths and by a continuing desire to get rid of anything that it regards as elitist, as marking out high ability in the education system.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the next statement, I will try to give some priority to those hon. Members who have not been called on this one.

Education and Training

4.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the plans for which I am responsible, which are set out in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century", announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

This White Paper will transform the prospects for Britain's 16 to 19-year-olds. The proposals will mean that, for the first time, all young people in the country up to the age of 19 will be encouraged and entitled to continue in education or training—or both—which will take them to higher levels of qualifications than ever before. And the artificial barriers between the academic and the vocational, which have bedevilled us for so long, will be swept away.

The plans in this White Paper represent a clear recognition of the importance of preparing our young people for the world of work, and the priority we attach to it.

First, we plan to attract many more young people into training by giving a training credit to every 16 and 17-year-old leaving full-time education. Training credits are a new way of promoting youth training. The credit puts buying power in the hands of young people. It encourages them to take up their entitlement to vocational education, and to take full advantage of training, and of the opportunity to qualify with a national vocational qualification at level 2 or higher.

Credits are now being offered to 10 per cent. of school leavers in pilot areas. With the experience of these pilots to build on, we will progressively extend credits from April 1993. Within the lifetime of the next Parliament, we aim to offer a training credit to every 16 and 17-year-old in the country who is leaving full-time education.

Secondly, we shall also extend across the whole country the compacts approach to bringing together young people and employers in raising attainment at school and college. At present, compacts are working highly successfully in urban programme areas and similar areas in Scotland and Wales. We shall invite training and enterprise councils, in partnership with local education authorities and others, to extend this approach to all parts of the country. We shall provide financial support to start compacts—matching the support they will attract from private sector and local authority sources.

I turn next to vocational qualifications. A great deal of progress has been made in developing and extending practical, job-related qualifications. Our proposals will create a structure of qualifications that offers the breadth and choice that young people and their employers need, and in which academic and vocational qualifications will have equal status.

National vocational qualifications will be available for all major sectors of employment by the end of next year. We are inviting the National Council for Vocational Qualifications to work with others to develop more general job-related qualifications, within the NVQ framework, suitable for young people who want a broad preparation for employment. We shall promote equality of status for academic and vocational qualifications by developing the new system of ordinary and advanced diplomas that my right hon. and learned Friend described in his statement.

[Mr. Michael Howard]

Our plans in the White Paper—especially training credits—will increase the importance of high-quality career services, linked closely to employers. I have been consulting about ways of organising the careers service for its future tasks. There is considerable support for my proposal that training and enterprise councils should be involved as partners with local education authorities in overseeing the operation of the service locally.

We shall encourage local education authorities to work with TECs in partnership for this purpose. We shall provide financial support to start such partnerships where they are proposed. We intend also to legislate so as to open up a range of other options, including direct TEC management of the careers service and contracting out to the private sector. We shall increase investment in the training of careers service advisory staff and in careers libraries in schools.

Employer commitment is essential if young people are to be well prepared for the demands of working life. The measures that I have announced today will give employers, through TECs, extended roles in training credits, compacts, and the careers service. My right hon. and learned Friend's proposed reforms of further education will include measures to involve TECs closely in the new funding arrangements.

The range of proposals in the White Paper will provide greater opportunities for young people to unlock their potential, a much wider choice in how they develop their talents, and a strengthened support system to guide their progress. These proposals will open doors for all our young people, whatever their background and their aspirations. They will strengthen the foundation of skills that the economy will need in future. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): First, I shall deal with some of the matters with which we are already familiar. The Secretary of State knows that we support compacts, but we would want to see how the pilot schemes for credits progress. Will he state clearly that no young people will be prevented from pursuing the career of their choice by inadequately financed credits? Will credits be a cash-limited voucher or a genuine entitlement to train, with the credit varying to meet the cost of that training? Will he comment on the fact that there have been real-terms cuts of some £400 million in youth training in the past few years? That cannot be the best way to launch a new training credits scheme.

As for proposals on the careers service, I hope that the Secretary of State will agree that the careers service is vital to improve training. He said that he intends to legislate for an option of contracting out the careers service to the private sector. What does he mean by that? We vigorously oppose any attempt to privatise the careers service or to allow it to opt out of local education authority control. As for a halfway house of part TEC, part local education authority control, will he guarantee that independent and impartial careers advice will be open to young people?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the client of the careers service must be the young person concerned, not the employer or company? Will he therefore accept that, in involving the training and enterprise councils, he must guard against the risk of a conflict between the interests of employers and companies and those of the young person? That is precisely what the independent careers service is designed to guard against.

Will the Secretary of State outline much more clearly the rules that will apply in this new partnership, and say how the new system will work? In particular, who will take ultimate responsibility for the critical decisions that affect young people?

Have not the Secretary of State and his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science admitted many of the criticisms that the Labour party and others have made of the divisions between education and training in the past few years? The Secretary of State for Employment has accepted—there is now agreement—that there is a division between standards and status in vocational and academic qualifications; that that division is harmful; and that it is imperative to remove it to improve the performance of the economy and provide opportunities for our young people? That much we can agree on. Is not the difference between what the Government have proposed today and the Opposition's position that the Government believe that it is possible to retain a separate and divided system of qualifications, and still abolish the difference in status, whereas we believe that abolishing the separate and divided system of qualifications is an essential part of abolishing the divided status?

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): That is levelling down.

Mr. Blair: No, it is nothing to do with levelling down.

Will the Secretary of State confirm, because I do not think that some Conservative Members realise it, that the advanced diploma does not replace the existing divided system of qualifications, but is superimposed on it? The diploma is a layer of qualification on the existing system, not an attempt to deal with the real problem—the division of the system itself. That is why the proposal bears all the hallmarks, not of the bold and radical step that the Secretary of State presented, but of an uneasy compromise between two Ministers in two different Departments with the essential divisions remaining intact.

I say to the Secretary of State for Employment that, if all that were required to achieve parity of esteem were ministerial words, the Business and Technician Education Council or the City and Guilds would already have achieved those results. Despite their attempts, excellent though many of them are, in the real world the problem that everyone recognises is that people go for the vocational route when they fail the academic route. That system, based on failure rather than achievement, is at the heart of low staying-on rates, low participation, low opportunities for progress and low attainment.

There cannot be equivalence of esteem while there are different styles, structures, contents and modes of assessment. If we do not deal with those differences, we do not deal effectively with parity of esteem. The Labour party believes that a divided system of qualifications will never produce a unified status of achievement. That is why we have proposed an entirely different idea from that of the Government—a unified system of qualifications. That is not just the Labour party's policy, but the policy of the Royal Society, the Association of Principals of Sixth Form Colleges and many other organisations.

One of the reasons for proposing integration between vocational and academic qualifications is that it allows

transfer between those two systems. How will that transfer operate under the Secretary of State's advanced diploma? If that transfer will not operate—as I believe it will not—why is he simply perpetuating the irredeemable choice at 16 for either the vocational or academic route, which is at the heart of the problem?

We believe that the problem required vision and leadership, which have been lacking from today's statements. We believe that our young people have enormous ability, but that we waste it through outdated examination systems and old-fashioned structures which have no place in any country preparing itself for the 21st century. Our young people have the talent, but they are hindered by a Government that neither believe in them nor are prepared to help them. In order to have that help, young people will have to wait for this party to take office.

Mr. Howard: First of all, I welcome what the hon. Gentleman said about our proposals for compacts. I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman has the temerity even to mention funding, bearing in mind the facts that we are spending two and a half times as much in real terms as that being spent on training when the last Labour Government left office, that 350,000 young people are receiving training on Government schemes compared with 6,000 when the Labour Government left office, and that every time the hon. Gentleman pops up to mention funding he is promptly disowned by the shadow Chief Secretary, as happened most recently on television yesterday.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to acknowledge the importance of independence and impartiality in the careers service. I readily do that. They are important. I believe that the conflicts to which the hon. Gentleman referred as a result of the training and enterprise councils are not likely to give rise to serious problems. We had an overwhelmingly favourable response in our consultation exercise both from training and enterprise councils and from local education authorities about the proposal for partnership.

The hon. Gentleman referred to legislating for opting out. The present position is that, even if a local education authority would like to contract out the delivery of the careers service, it is unable to do so. We shall legislate to enable it to do so if it wishes and to enable the partnership between the TEC and LEA to do so if it wishes; we shall see how that develops over the fulness of time. If, as may well prove the case, that model proves successful, it would be right to have reserve powers to ensure that it becomes the normal way in which to deliver the careers service.

The hon. Gentleman referred to vocational qualification. I can only conclude from his remarks that he has completely misunderstood the effects of our proposals for a diploma. We are not dividing, or persisting in the divide between, academic and vocational qualifications. We are bringing the two together, and bringing together the best of the two without abolishing A-levels, which is the Labour party's only policy in the area. The Labour party is the enemy of excellence; it always has been and it always will be.

The hon. Gentleman was disingenuous in his remarks about training credits. He said that he would see how our pilots were developing and examine training credits. However, he knows full well that there is a complete antithesis and contradiction between our approach of credits, which is a voluntary approach that gives young people the opportunity to buy training for themselves, and his approach of taking the big stick of compulsion, and forbidding young people to have jobs without training while allowing and encouraging them to go on the dole without training. That is the Labour party's policy, and it is not surprising that the hon. Gentleman was too ashamed of it to mention it this afternoon.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to remind hon. Members about the pressure on the subsequent debate. I will allow questions on the statement until 5.5 pm. Then I regret that we must move on. I ask hon. Members to put brief questions.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his proposals on training credits and on his other fundamentally important proposals? Does he agree that one of the outstanding successes of the Government has been the introduction of compacts throughout the country? Does he also agree that that signifies a real revolution in training, in that the worlds of education and of industry have now come close together, which is fundamentally important for young people?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to his work during his time in the Department, both on compacts and on training credits. He did much of the spadework on that. He is entirely right: it is one of the Government's great achievements, now recognised on all sides, to have brought together the world of work and the world of education. It was not always so. When we first proposed the technical and vocational education initiative, the Leader of the Opposition went around the country denouncing it as a scheme fit only for hewers of wood and drawers of water. I am delighted that the Labour party appears to have learnt something from the year's experience.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As my hon. Friend the Minister for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said, we substantially support the package presented today. However, I am sure that the House agrees that changing institutions and arrangements is no substitute for restoring the cuts in funding in recent years.

Will the Secretary of State answer the question put by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on training credits? He asked that the credit should not be a cash limit on the course of training sought by a young person. Although the Secretary of State makes a persuasive case for the voluntary approach, what advice would he give a young person who finds himself or herself in a job with an employer who is not amenable to that young person pursuing a course of training?

Mr. Howard: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's last question, I must say that one of the great advantages of the training credit is that it can be used in a number of ways, and not simply and solely with the employer. If a young person has an employer who is not amenable to providing training, he can use the credit in a number of other ways, such as to purchase open learning, which is becoming increasingly important in the acquisition of qualifications, and in which this country leads the world.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am happy to confirm that the account on the training credit will not be

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a limit. It will be topped up by employers or by the training and enterprise councils to reflect the full value of the training concerned.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept my warm congratulations on the measures that he has announced? Will he accept that Conservative Members warmly welcome the bridging and equalisation between the more vocational structure and the purely academic structure, with the raising of standards of careers qualifications? That is a great step forward for thousands of people who will be able to raise their standards.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he is entirely right. Far too often in the past young people pursued vocational qualifications because they had failed, or were thought to be likely to fail, academic qualifications. That should become a thing of the past. We want to encourage true parity of esteem for vocational qualifications so that young people who are more suited by their abilities and aptitudes to pursue vocational qualifications should be able to do so to a high standard. The proposals will deliver that.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Is the Secretary of State aware of the report on young people, benefits and training, published by the Children's Society on behalf of the Coalition of Young People on Social Security? That report points out that 45,000 young people are currently without jobs, youth training or income support because, although the Government may have promised a youth training scheme, they have cut income support, totally undermining the youth training guarantee. How will the training credits resolve that problem?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. Far from undermining the youth training guarantee, the fact that young people are encouraged to take a place on youth training if they wish to receive benefit reinforces the importance and usefulness of the guarantee. The hon. Gentleman has his facts entirely upside down.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. and learned Friend on the generous, imaginative and skilfully purpose-designed scheme, which focuses on the most vital component in our society—the seedcorn of our national future?

May I draw my right hon. and learned Friend's attention to the phenomenon that there are still some youngsters who manage to slip through into their first job—and others will do so in the future—without having any preliminary training? If they have the misfortune to be made redundant early in their working life, is it possible for the scheme to be applied retrospectively to those of a certain age group, so that they do not finally miss the bus? I speak on that with some feeling against the background of substantial redundancies, about which I have written to my right hon. and learned Friend, at Middlebrook Mushrooms in my constituency.

Mr. Howard: I understand my right hon. Friend's concern about the case that has arisen and about that group of people. Many of them would be entitled to the credit. It is to meet the needs of the first group identified by my right hon. Friend—those who have slipped through into jobs without training—that the entire proposal for credits is designed. From the pilots, all the signs are that the scheme is proving extremely successful, and I intend to build on that success in the years ahead.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Can the Secretary of State ensure that there will be further consultation with careers masters on this matter? Can he also ensure that the responsibility in Wales comes cleanly under the Welsh Office and that there is no split in responsibility? Will he clarify whether the £1,000 referred to as a typical voucher may be extended to £1,000 in a second year for training courses that may go on for more than one year?

Mr. Howard: On the last point, it can certainly be extended in that way. I reiterate what I said earlier—that the face value of the voucher does not represent the whole of the entitlement of the young person. Very often, a voucher with a face value of £1,000 or £1,500 will be able to be used to buy training worth up to £4,000, and the balance will of course be found by the employer or the training and enterprise council. The voucher is merely the first part of the entitlement.

Responsibility for the careers service in Wales will continue exactly as it is at the moment. We have consulted widely about the arrangements for the careers service, and if there are any further views or representations that careers officers wish to make, of course we will wish to take those into account.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, with the announcements that are made today, the Government are committing themselves to harnessing the energy of school leavers, whatever their background and whatever their ability, whether it be vocational or educational? Will provision be made within the training credits scheme to give those children who leave and who are less able the opportunity to use that credit for further education in basic education—reading, writing and arithmetic?

Mr. Howard: Where that is necessary, arrangements can be made within the training credits scheme for provision of that kind to be made available to the young person. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the importance of the proposals. They represent a landmark in the development of opportunities for our young people. It is a pity that that cannot be recognised to a greater extent on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Does not the Secretary of State acknowledge that fine phrases such as "true parity of esteem" are very much part of Opposition Members' fundamental philosophy and belief? It does not stand up to a very much detailed examination coming from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, any more than from the Prime Minister talking about a classless society, when we know, and all the evidence shows, that people in our society with academic qualifications on the one hand and a vocation on the other do not receive true parity of esteem throughout their working lives. The gaps between their incomes, for example, get wider and wider throughout their working lives.

One example of the Secretary of State's real commitment to true parity of esteem would be his commitment, as it is our commitment, to a national minimum wage which would at least put a little bit of beef

behind his words and recognise the fact that everyone in our community is esteemed and valued and that no one should fall out of the net.

Mr. Howard: I wish the hon. Gentleman could see the face of the hon. Member for Sedgefield as he asked that question. I had imposed a self-denying ordinance on myself this afternoon. I was not going to mention the national minimum wage, despite the fact that only today the Fabian Society, no less, has produced a pamphlet in which it estimates the number of jobs that it would destroy at 800,000—not quite right, not quite accurate, not the nearly 2 million that it would in fact destroy, but at least we are making progress when the Fabian Society recognises that that would be the case. If the hon. Gentleman really thinks that destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs is a way to improve opportunities, he would have great difficulty in persuading the electorate of that.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Both Secretaries of State should take no lectures from the Opposition about the quality of education or training. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is well aware that most local education authorities in this country are controlled by the Labour party, so they must take the blame for low standards. Is he aware that, where a local education authority controlled by the Conservative party seeks to tackle the question of vocational studies such as through magnet schools, the Labour party is the first to rail against the proposal?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on the views of the chairmen of the TECs that perhaps, in the long term, training should come within the powers of the Department of Education and Science to bring the whole together?

Mr. Howard: On my hon. Friend's last point, the views of employers as expressed through the TECs and through the Department of Employment have made a very significant contribution to training and, indeed, to education over the past few years. My hon. Friend made an important point about the influence of local education authorities, and it is well known. League table after league table has pointed out that Labour local education authorities spend huge amounts for little attainment and Conservative local education authorities, for much less spending, get the results which the people who live in those areas expect.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Secretary of State not accept that, despite all his fine words, the fact remains that people will have no confidence in them, given that 60 per cent. of trainees now come out of his Government's training schemes with no qualifications at all? He has cut and cut training provision in west Wales, for example, by half over the past year. Compared with all our foreign competitors, we are now in the worst possible position in terms of training provision.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Another lie. *[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members: Order. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If I heard that word "liar", which I hope would never be mentioned in this Chamber, the hon. Member should withdraw it, please.

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No point of order arises. I am not certain who said it, but I hope that we will not hear that word in this Chamber.

Mr. Favell: I apologise for having said it, but the party opposite is trying to protect——

Mr. Speaker: No qualification, please—just the apology will suffice.

Mr. Hain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Secretary of State accept that the people of this country will see all those fine words for what they are—an attempt to cover up the reality of lack of training provision in this country—and that, like the Secretary of State for Education and Science, he is providing for a nation of morons who have forgotten how many O-levels they have?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's facts are entirely wrong. Of those who complete youth training, 67 per cent. obtain a vocational qualification. The hon. Gentleman's charge is a quite unwarranted slur both on the calibre of our young people and on the calibre of the training that they receive.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that employers will welcome what he has said in his statement, as they have to find the wages of those who apply for jobs after having been educated and trained? They have been crying out for years for improvements. The proposals, combined with the proposals of our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, will prove most imaginative for the future. Far from showing that the Government have run out of ideas, the proposals are well beyond any of the ideas that would ever be adopted by the Opposition.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that he is right, and I am sure that the proposals will be warmly welcomed by employers who recognise full well the importance of having properly trained, properly equipped and properly educated young people leaving our schools and institutions of further and higher education.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): What increased expenditure has been estimated to cover the improved and extended training credits? Will there be a parallel increase in the number of discretionary grants available to students in vocational education provided by local authorities?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that training credits will not be available to be spent at the nationwide network of skill centres that he inherited? Will he confirm that they have been given away to a handful of civil servants, together with suitcases full of money, in a scandalous misappropriation and misuse of taxpayers' funds, which has meant that a nationwide system of skill centres has been broken up and closed down and its teachers sacked?

Mr. Howard: The additional resources that will be made available for training credits amount to £14 million in the year 1993-94 and £35 million in the year 1994-95, and the total resources available to training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies for the new credits in 1994-95 will amount to £200 million. Discretionary grants are a matter for local education authorities, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He has asked questions about

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skill centres many times before. They have been comprehensively answered, but I dare say that he will continue to pursue his vendetta on that point.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn, Hatfield): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Labour party rejects excellence, rejects A-levels and rejects diplomas? Does he further agree that it has produced a new A-level and new diploma which has been passed by the Leader of the Opposition called "lying in Monmouth?"

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I heard over the weekend that that word was being bandied about. In this Chamber, we keep our standards. I hope that hon. Members will not make charges of that nature against other hon. Members.

Mr. Howard: There is an important point behind my hon. Friend's question. When the Labour party talks about parity of esteem, it means lowering parity of esteem. When we talk about parity of esteem, we mean maintaining high standards for both academic and vocational education.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a long-term sceptic about and opponent of taking the Scottish universities, and especially their science faculties, out of the British university system, may I ask about the financing of Scottish education? At all levels—those for which the right hon. and learned Gentleman is responsible and those for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible —the Scots have an extra number of students over and above England. Now that the responsibility is to be given to the Scottish Office, will the financing be pro rata on the basis of numbers or on the basis of population? What does one say to a lecturer in the biological sciences at the university of Edinburgh? Is his career still as safe and good in Edinburgh as it was before today's proposals were made? And what is——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Dalyell: —to be done about Edinburgh university's desperate financial position, which has forced it to sell its treasures such as the Audubon book?

Mr. Howard: I can confirm that the funding of the Scottish institutions will continue to be linked to the number of students. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman puts the other more specific questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, far from what the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) suggested, the announcement today about training credits is bold and imaginative and will be widely welcomed by many young people as an extension of their personal choice and opportunities? Is not the announcement a refreshing difference from the policies of the Labour party, which are old-fashioned and out of date on this as on so many other matters, and are based on compulsion and dragooning young people?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was disappointed with the remarks of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain). I thought that he would allow me to pay tribute to the Welsh education system, to which I owe so much, but instead he engaged in a characteristic Neath whinge. I say that because Neath was well beaten by Llanelli in the Welsh rugby cup final. My hon. Friend is right to identify the merits of the approach that we have adopted. I dare say that, in time, as in so many other matters, those merits will eventually be recognised by the Labour party.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): May I congratulate both my right hon. and learned Friends on the thoughtful and imaginative proposals put before the House today? Are not the Opposition strangely out of touch with what is going on in our schools today? Do they not realise that craft design and technology courses are over-subscribed in all our best schools, and that such courses naturally lead on to a mixture of A-levels and vocational qualifications? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, by retaining A-levels as a standard of excellence and moving vocational qualifications up to that standard, we are making certain that standards are maintained? Therefore, we are seeking to create a system of excellence and to make great attainment available to our people, whereas the Labour party would like to level us all down to a lower standard.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend accept——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a long question—with not much of a question in it either.

Mr. Wells: I have waited a long time, and I should like to put my last sentence.

Mr. Speaker: Put it, please, but it is at the expense of the hon. Member's hon. Friends.

Mr. Wells: My last sentence is: will training credits be available for studying A-levels as well as for the higher grant diplomas?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right to identify excellence as the hallmark of the Government's approach to these and other matters. The training credits are intended for training, not for pursuit of A-level courses, and they will be available for vocational qualifications.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the twin statements will be widely welcomed by the worlds of education and work, in which people will be extraordinarily puzzled by the reaction of the Labour party, which seems to be in favour of no jobs without training, but nevertheless has a policy of unemployment with no training? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his statement will provide great opportunities? Will he confirm that that opportunity will be extended to disabled people who need training so that they too can benefit from what should be the golden years of opportunity ahead?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am happy to give him the assurance for which he asks. Certainly, those who have special needs will be entitled to training credits. I am sure that they will make good use of the opportunities that training credits will provide.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will both my right hon. and learned Friends accept congratulations on the concept of the advanced diploma? Will it be a pass/fail

document or, as I hope, will there be levels of pass, including ones which indicate excellence and ones which indicate perhaps not quite such a high attainment?

Mr. Howard: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the national record of achievement, which has escaped notice so far this afternoon. It has been issued to 1·3 million people in a short period of time. It will enable the performance and qualifications that people have achieved to be set out in full.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the presentation of Bills first.

BILLS PRESENTED

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. John Bowis, supported by Mr. Tony Banks, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. Matthew Carrington, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Toby Jessel and Mr. Ron Leighton, presented a Bill to make further provision with respect to the reporting of marine accident investigations: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 June and to be printed. [Bill 162.]

COMMONWEALTH OF BRITAIN

Mr. Tony Benn presented a Bill to establish a democratic, federal and secular Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Wales dedicated to the welfare of all its citizens; to establish fundamental human rights within that Commonwealth; to lower the voting age to 16 years and to make other provision with respect to elections, including equal representation for women; to prescribe a constitutional oath; to establish a Commonwealth Parliament consisting of the House of Commons and the House of the People and to make provision for the term of a Parliament and for legislative and other procedure; to establish the office of President, and a Council of State, and to prescribe the powers of each; to provide for the formation of governments; to amend the law relating to official information, the armed forces and the security services; to make fresh provision for the participation of Britain in the United Nations Organisation and the European Communities; to make the basing of foreign forces in Britain dependent upon the approval of the House of Commons; to make new provision with respect to the judicial system and to establish a National Legal Service; to set up national Parliaments for England, Scotland and Wales; to amend the law relating to local government, the district auditor and the accountability of police forces; to end the constitutional status of the Crown and to make certain consequential provision; to abolish the House of Lords and the Privy Council, to end the recognition in law of personal titles, and to provide for the acknowledgement of service to the community; to disestablish the Church of England, abolish the offence of blasphemy, and to provide for equality under the law for all religions and beliefs; to end British jurisdiction in Northern Ireland; to provide for a Constitution and for constitutional amendment; and to make transitional and related provision: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 June and to be printed. [Bill 161.]

Mr. Speaker: Now, what is the point of order?

Mr Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I called during the statement the hon. Member and all the hon. Members who now wish to raise points of order. However, I also drew attention to the fact that there was great pressure on the subsequent debate.

Mr. Cryer: It is not about that.

Mr. Speaker: Well, it takes time from the hon. Member's colleagues.

Mr. Cryer: It is a very important subject, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any application for a statement about the Government either activating existing legislation for the control of dangerous dogs or introducting new legislation? There has been a serious accident in Bradford in which a little six-year-old girl has been savagely attacked by a pit bull terrier. It is a subject on which I hoped the Government would seek your permission to make a statement.

Mr. Speaker: I have not had any intimation that the Government wish to make a statement. It seems to me that it is a matter that should be raised in the House.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Wallace: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This may be the point of order that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) wishes to raise. A White Paper has been issued today on further education in Scotland. The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked questions which the Secretary of State for Employment was clearly unable to answer because they were on Scottish matters. We are constantly reminded by the Conservative party, and indeed by you, Mr. Speaker, that this is a Parliament of the United Kingdom. Have you had any explanation of why there was not a separate statement about Scottish matters?

Mr. Speaker: I have not had any intimation, but I am sure that that will have been heard by those responsible.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: On the same matter?

Mr. Dalyell: It is the same matter. The Secretary of State for Employment correctly said that the questions that I asked had to be answered by the Secretary of State for Scotland. This is a vital matter, which particularly affects the lives of many English people as well as Scots in the Scottish universities. It especially affects the great science departments of the universities of Edinburgh and of Glasgow. In those circumstances—if the Leader of the House was present, my request would be within his hearing—can we have a statement tomorrow from the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: The Whip is on the Bench. I gave the hon. Member an opportunity to put his question on the statement. I could not have done more than that today.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), Mr. Speaker. Could you advise Back-Bench Members how we can get the Home Secretary to come to the House and make a statement on the outrageous savaging of the little girl in Bradford? Public opinion and, it would seem, the local press is way ahead of the Home Secretary. The *Yorkshire Post* mounted a

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

campaign, which I and many of my colleagues support, hours before the latest outrage. We feel that the public deserve some protection from these dangerous animals.

Mr. Speaker: I say again that I had anticipated that there might be a bid to have this matter raised. It was not raised with me earlier today, but I am sure that the subject should be debated in the House at some time. It might be a useful subject for an Adjournment debate.

Next Steps

[Relevant documents: Eighth report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of session 1989-90 on "Progress in the Next Steps Initiative" (House of Commons Paper No. 481) and the Government's reply (Cm. 1263).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Mr. Speaker: A great many right hon. and hon. Members—13 of them—wish to participate in the debate. I ask the four Front-Bench spokesmen to trim their speeches, and Back Benchers to bear that restraint in mind.

5.10 pm

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): If, a generation ago, a Minister had spoken from the Dispatch Box about a revolution in the civil service, there is no doubt that the next day a cartoon by Osbert Lancaster would have appeared in the *Daily Express* showing a series of gentlemen in bowler hats with rolled umbrellas at the ready marching from Marsham street or Victoria street towards Whitehall. No doubt, there would also have been a picture of Maudie Littlehampton on the pavement looking suitably amazed. But times have changed in the civil service. Bowler hats and rolled umbrellas are out—if they were ever in—and instead, especially in Departments and offices outside London, the order of the day tends to be jeans and tee shirts with suitably lurid stencils on them. The composition of the civil service today is more like that of Marks and Spencer. More than half the staff are women, most have not been in the civil service for long, and four out of five are located outside London and the south-east. Another key difference is that 95 per cent. of the staff are mainly involved not in taking weighty decisions but in providing service to the public.

A quiet revolution is taking place—a revolution started by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)——

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): An old idea.

Mr. Renton: I am coming to that.

I am delighted to see the Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in his place. The Select Committee described next steps in its most recent report as the most ambitious attempt at civil service reform in the 20th century. It may also be seen as the latest stage in a process of reform dating back to the Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854—the basis of today's impartial civil service with competitive recruitment on merit—through to the Fulton report in 1968, which put the focus on management and on the job to be done. That process continued through the financial management initiative in the 1980s, which introduced the idea of delegating budget responsibility to managers, and the Ibbs next steps report in 1988, which gave its name to the policy. Now, in 1991, we have the Fraser report. I believe that Sir Robin Ibbs's contribution to civil service reform is likely to earn him the ultimate accolade—a building at one of the executive agencies for which I am responsible, at the civil service college, called after him; just as Northcote, Chaucer and other famous civil servants have had buildings named after them at the college in Sunningdale.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): What an accolade.

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his enthusiastic support for the suggestion.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will there be an Ingham building at Sunningdale for studying the arts of prime ministerial press secretaryship? Does the Minister approve, under the new reforms, of civil servants in the most sensitive positions publishing 400-page books about the very recent past? How does Bernard Ingham's book, "Kill the Messenger", fit in with the civil service reforms?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman has not waited long to make his obvious intervention. Reading the Crossman diaries, with which the hon. Gentleman will be familiar —indeed, he features in them—one is hardly struck by the Labour Government's detached, balanced and fair approach to the civil service. As the hon. Gentleman will remember, the Labour party governed by intervening in the civil service to promote those who acquiesced in their overtly political views. Joe Haines, the famous Labour press officer, might seem to make Mr. Ingham look like a St. Bernard in a Trappist convent by comparison.

I shall return to my main subject, and leave Mr. Ingham and other former press secretaries to one side. First, I pay tribute to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I am delighted that its Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), is in the Chamber today. I very much welcome the input from Committees of the House, especially from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. It is fair to say that the development of next steps has been a team effort between the Select Committee and the Government.

The TCSC is about to embark on its fourth annual inquiry into next steps. I realise that this debate may have caused it to postpone its initial sitting. I apologise for that, but the debate flows from a recommendation in the Committee's eighth report of the 1989-90 Session. I very much welcome the recent appointment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) to that Committee. I welcome him not only as my predecessor as Minister for the Arts and Minister of State, Privy Council Office, but because I know that he will make a valuable contribution to the vital work of the Committee. It is a pleasure to see that Sussex Members are so well represented on the Committee.

I also acknowledge the work of the Public Accounts Committee on next steps matters. Both sides of the House will recognise and welcome the broad parliamentary support for the aim of next steps. I fully agree with the letter on that subject from my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing in today's *Financial Times*. I have already welcomed the contribution made from the very start of the project by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), and I am pleased to put that on record.

The House will be aware of the excellent progress made in implementing next steps. Hon. Members will know that from answers that I have frequently given from the Dispatch Box over the past few months and from the regular announcements by Secretaries of State in charge of the relevant Departments involved with next steps agencies that have recently been created. Today, more than 200,000 civil sevants are working along next steps lines. There are 50 established agencies, ranging from the Social Security Benefits Agency, which employs nearly 70,000 staff, to the Queen Elizabeth conference centre, which employs 70. There are a further 23 announced candidates so far, and more are to come. The Fraser report, which was published last week, is aptly entitled, "Making the Most of Next Steps". We should pay particular attention to that during the debate.

Setting up agencies is only part of the job. The other side is to make sure that the arrangements work in practice. Sir Angus Fraser, the Prime Minister's adviser in the efficiency unit, the successor to Sir Robin Ibbs, was asked to examine the relationship between Departments and agencies, and how Departments should adapt their size, structure and methods of working in the light of next steps. The Fraser report was published on 16 May, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commented on it in some detail in his written reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing that day.

The report confirms that next steps is leading to real improvements in the quality of service and better value for money. I shall describe some of those results in a minute, but the key point is perhaps somewhat more intangible —it is that both sides of the bargain between Ministers and chief executives should be strengthened. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, Ministers must be able to give agencies clear strategic direction firmly related to the Government's policy objectives.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that they must determine the financial resources that are to be made available, and that they must select and set suitably robust and meaningful targets covering quality of service, financial performance and efficiency. My right hon. Friend also said that they must be able to call chief executives to account for their performance. The role of people in the central core of Whitehall Departments is to provide well-informed and authoritative support to Ministers so that Ministers can do just that. As a result, the number of people at the centre of Departments can be reduced.

On the other side of the bargain, we are seeking personal responsibility and authority for chief executives to run their organisations, since it is they who are responsible for achieving the progressive improvements in performance, quality of service and value for money that we seek. Agencies' delegations and flexibilities can be enlarged as their track record of performance is established, provided essential controls on public expenditure are not jeopardised. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing agrees. The principle is that the chief executive should have maximum managerial authority to run his agency as he thinks right, unless there are good reasons to the contrary. The process may vary between Departments and agencies.

As hon. Members know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has asked the head of the home civil service to take forward in each Department the ideas in the report, and to do that in ways that fit each activity. The next steps project manager in my Department has been instructed to work with the Treasury and with other Departments to bring that about. The Fraser report says that Departments need to consider their role in support of Ministers in relation to agencies. The three important issues are: first, giving chief executives the authority, responsibility and incentives that they need to deliver better results and holding them to account for their performance; secondly, allowing managers in agencies and Departments to shop around for the best buy for support services; and, thirdly, reducing headquarters staff, especially in personnel and

[Mr. Renton]

finance divisions. The report says that a reduction of a quarter in the total of such staff in these functions should be sought.

The Fraser report confirms an idea that is at the heart of next steps—responsibility should be firmly placed with one named individual. Personal responsibility and scope to bring about results are surely the ways to release the energies, skills and enthusiasms that are to be found in our civil service.

All this is surely just a means to the simple end of the improved results that we are seeing. I shall give a few examples of the improved results and initiatives that have flowed from next steps and explain why the Government, with the support of the whole House, want to take it forward. Many agencies recover some or all of their costs from charges. The Meteorological Office, which is not always the most favoured organisation in the land, sells tailored weather forecasts, income from which is running at more than £500,000 a year. I shall give two examples of how that is helping the taxpayer and business. Last August, a retailer took Met Office advice that the warm weather would continue and bought stock of over £1 million worth of tee shirts. He sold them all. Ice cream manufacturers and brewers are consulting the Met Office to help improve their forecasts of demand. Many processes depend on weather factors, such as humidity, and by tailoring its forecast to what the customer needs to know, the Met Office is developing new services and new customers.

Driving Standards Agency examiners now explain faults to failed candidates to help them understand where they were going wrong. The agency published "Your Driving Test" to help people pass the test and improve standards on our roads. That book is now in *The Sunday Times* list of best sellers, which says much for the standard of driving in this country. The agency's target was to reduce waiting times for tests in non-metropolitan areas to eight weeks, and it is offering tests on Saturdays.

The Employment Service job club opened on a pilot basis in Pentonville prison. So far 24 people have passed through and nine found jobs. Similar facilities offered via the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders exist at Holloway and 24 people out of 66 have found jobs. The Employment Service has made the UB40 signing card more user friendly and has related it to getting a job rather than just drawing unemployment benefit. Customer satisfaction will be measured annually among agency customers by means of a survey by the Office of Population Censuses and Statistics.

The recently established Passport Agency has a target to reduce the time taken to process correct applications to within 20 days in January to July and to within 10 days at other times. It is considering differential pricing to smooth out demand over the year, and is planning a new financial regime to help match resources to swings and demand.

The Historic Royal Palaces Agency faced a problem because of the success of the crown jewels as a crowd puller. Long queues were spoiling the day for everyone, so the agency installed video screens, made a film about the crowd jewels and the Tower. It found that some people are so keen to watch it right through that they give up their place in the queue to see the real jewels. That clever idea keeps everyone happy.

The Social Security Benefits Agency, which has just been launched, is setting targets to clear applications for specific benefits within published times—on the same day for crisis loans, within five days for income support and within seven days for community care grants.

Mr. John Garrett: Does the Social Security Benefits Agency have as one of its aims an increase in take-up rates?

Mr. Renton: Its aim is to clear applications for benefits within the times that I have stated, and that should have the effect of increasing take-up. The hon. Gentleman should look at the framework document in detail. If the target is to provide the benefits within such short periods, the take-up is likely to increase.

I disagree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who said in the House last week that the establishment of this agency was simply motivated by a desire to reduce costs. Plainly, that is not so. One target relates to the level of customer satisfaction expressed, and that will be verified by an independent national survey of opinions of all groups of customers. The agency will carry out local surveys to identify customer needs, and will introduce customer service managers and a new customer satisfaction measure. All those improvements are clearly aimed at making the service more user friendly, easier to approach and easier to obtain results from.

All the initiatives that I have mentioned, and many more, are greatly in line with the ideas about which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke in the context of a citizens' charter. They are about responding to the customer, and empowering him, which must be the purpose of empowering agency chief executives.

Next steps opens up what government does. Every agency has a framework document in which its aims and objectives and the targets set by the Minister are published. All agencies are required to report on what they have done and to produce and publish combined annual reports and accounts. Those will be signed by the chief executive and audited by the National Audit Office and will provide unparalleled information on agency activities. The annual reports for 1990-91 will be published from July onwards.

The House will recall that the targets set for agencies last year were included in the first next steps review which was published in October. I shall certainly consider repeating that exercise. All this means more openness, more information in the public domain for taxpayers, customers and Parliament and, in most cases, this is for the first time.

The Government's privatisation policies continue. The Government continue to keep under review the basis on which Government services are provided. The feasibility of immediate privatisation has been considered and rejected for all agencies so far, with the exception of the National Engineering Laboratory, where it was made clear that agency status was en route to the private sector.

It cannot be ruled out that, after a period of some years, agencies, like other Government activities, may be suitable for privatisation. When an agency is established with a view to privatisation, this is made clear, as in the case of the National Engineering Laboratory. Privatisation and competition are the best friends of the consumer, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): What did all that mean? Is the Minister saying that, once an agency has been set up and it has been confirmed that it is not a candidate for privatisation in the immediate future, its future is safe?

Mr. Renton: I do not wish to repeat myself, as other hon. Members want to take part in the debate. I chose my words with care and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads them in the *Official Report*.

I shall take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff. The next steps policy makes sense to them, and this is another reason why the comments made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East on 9 May, when he talked about public servants being hounded and pilloried, were wrong. Quite the contrary: the next steps policy reflects a demand for change for the better that comes from the public servants as well as from the outside world—the customers who want a more responsive service and the taxpayers who want better value for money. Agency staff understand the job they have to do and they welcome being set clear targets, and being given the resources and the managerial scope to meet them. Like the people whom they serve, they can relate better to smaller units with clearer identity. The newly published Fraser report underlines the importance to staff in the centres of Departments, too, in having a clearly defined role and the satisfaction of using their abilities and energies to best effect in supporting and advising Ministers.

I also pay tribute to the trade unions, which have already been consulted about proposals to establish agencies, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley said they would be when she announced the proposals in February 1988. They will continue to be consulted about any changes in terms and conditions that are contemplated. There is no central strategy for union derecognition or any proposal to derecognise any union as a matter of policy.

Finally, I must say a word about accountability. Ministers set the targets and tasks and allocate the resources. Parliament and the public can see what they have done and what they have commissioned the agency to do. The chief executive is personally responsible for delivering the results. I am sure that the Fraser report is right to hint that with responsibility go both the reward for getting it right and the blame for getting it wrong.

We are taking great care to get the right people to be chief executives. Open competition is the normal route. Having got the right person for the job, we must have the confidence to let him get on with it. Accountability includes the requirement to be as responsive as possible to the concerns of Members of Parliament. I believe that direct contact between hon. Members and chief executives and appearances by chief executives, on behalf of Ministers, before Committees of the House will improve overall accountability and give a better service to Members and their constituents.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm and pride among civil servants for the work that they do and a strong commitment to providing the public with high-quality services, delivered in a business-like way. Through next steps, we hope to tap this enthusiasm and release the energy and skills of staff. This progressive reform has been introduced and carried forward by the Government. We shall pursue it with zest and popular support.

5.34 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The Minister may pursue reforms with zest until the next general election, but after that there will be a somewhat different view of the reforms, and a different line will be taken by the Labour party. I am glad that the Minister mentioned privatisation at the tail end of his speech, but, with his characteristic lack of incisiveness, he failed to mention the Government's hidden agenda of wholesale privatisation of civil service departments should the Conservative party win the next election.

I welcome the debate. If it were not for the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, little would be known about the workings of the agency system, as this is the first opportunity that the House has had to air its views on this vital aspect of the civil service and the way in which nearly half of our public services are being administered.

Mr. Renton: I shall not intervene again in the hon. Gentleman's speech, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak, but that comment is somewhat unjust. After all, my predecessor, with the then Prime Minister, published a report in October 1990. It is a detailed review of the next steps agencies after the first year in which many have been in progress. There is a great deal of detail in it and I have already said that I will consider publishing a similar report, quite apart from the annual accounts that will start to be published from July onwards.

Dr. Marek: I will come back later to that part of what the Minister said. However, this is the first time that the House of Commons has had a debate about agencies. Responsibility for these agencies and their day-to-day running has been shifted downwards to the chief executives without the consent of the House. Questions and letters from hon. Members are answered by chief executives, and this raises questions about ministerial responsibility and the access by hon. Members and the press to the letters that are deposited in the Library, rather than being published in *Hansard*.

We have had no debate on the shift in responsibility or on the dramatic changes in the way that our civil service operates. We have had no debate on the change in conditions, and its introduction, on those civil servants who contracted to work in the civil service but now work in different circumstances. Why were no pilot studies undertaken before the agency system was imposed on the civil service? When I say "imposed", I mean that. There has been little consultation with those civil servants who have to carry out the so-called reforms, despite the assurances by the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), who was the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, during the Second Reading of the Government Trading Funds Bill.

There have been no serious evaluations of the first three years of the workings of agencies—I except from this the efforts of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee.

We are faced with an increase of 26 agencies on top of the 50 or so already established, so it is time for a serious evaluation to be made.

A report to the Prime Minister called "Improving Management and Government: The Next Steps"—the Fraser report—may be the next step along the road of trying to ensure the triumph of party political dogma, but

[Dr. Marek]

it is a wild leap in the dark for good government. The integrity and skills of our civil service are highly regarded throughout the world. We have a reputation second to none, yet the civil service is now being fragmented in a way that could undermine one of the great foundations of our country.

Agencies may be the right way forward—the Labour party does not deny that. However, to deny debate, consultation and reassessment is a serious matter. In the hands of the right Government, agencies will be an asset, but in the hands of the wrong Government, whose motivation is one of profit before service, the consequences for the country could be devastating.

I come now to what I believe has been the main motive behind the introduction of these agencies—not the quality of service but how costs can be cut so that privatisation can follow.

Basically, the agencies were set up to cut staff and, where possible, to cut pay. The Treasury has worked on the principle of paying civil servants as little as it can get away with, and not a fair rate of pay to motivate civil servants and encourage them to do their jobs properly. That principle does not apply at the top end of the civil service, however. The head of the civil service will be paid £104,750 per annum. It will not be difficult to fill posts such as that.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I am having difficulty in following the hon. Gentleman's argument, which betrays a lack of understanding and knowledge of the civil service. Surely agency agreements recognise the skill of civil servants and devolve management accountability to a lower level. Surely that is what civil servants have been asking for over a long time. Will the hon. Gentleman answer a straight question: is he in favour of that devolution or is he not?

Dr. Marek: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be under a misapprehension. The report is about enabling chief executives and not devolving powers lower down the scale. The right hon. Gentleman says that the civil service has been asking for the establishment of agencies. He should be more specific and tell the House who has been asking for that. It is not something that appears in the Fraser report.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Marek: No. Let me finish my point first.

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman asked me a question.

Dr. Marek: I ask the right hon. Gentleman to sit down. I shall give way, but first I want to make my point. The right hon. Gentleman will take the time of others who wish to contribute to the debate if he insists on intervening.

As I have said, I should like to know who within the civil service has been asking for changes to be made. The answer to that question is not to be found in the Fraser report.

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall not intervene again after asking whether the hon. Gentleman seriously believes that either the employment service or the benefits service is opposed to this new policy development.

Dr. Marek: The benefits service is far more interested in having decent buildings in which its staff can provide proper services for those who are seeking support. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) intervened during the speech of the Minister of State. The right hon. Gentleman could have responded by saying that one of the quality of service conditions will be that any claimant will be told all his or her rights. If the right hon. Gentleman had made that statement, I would have been heartened, but unfortunately I heard no such statement. I do not suppose that I shall ever hear a Minister make such a statement, and that summarises the difference between the Opposition's approach to agencies and the Government's approach.

I said before the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) intervened that, in some circumstances, agencies could lead to an advance in administration within the civil service, but I have no hope that that will ever be achieved while the Government are in office. The most important factor is the delivery of a high-quality service. There has been no serious evaluation of quality and no proper examination of the sort of structure that is best for the provision of high-quality public services. No attempt has been made to compare the advantages of a national civil service with the supposed advantages of agencies.

In the opening of his report to the Prime Minister, Sir Angus Fraser says that there is general agreement that the next steps initiative is progressing well. I do not know who it is who is agreeing, and for what reasons. Where are improvements to be found in quality of service as a result of the changes? If there are improvements, can it be proved that they are the result of the move to agency status, or were they already in train in the pre-agency world? Could they have been achieved without establishing agencies?

In most agencies, unions are not meaningfully consulted when it comes to establishing targets. I agree, however, that they have been consulted in the course of arriving at framework agreements. The unions are not allowed an input into the corporate planning process in most agencies. Market research hardly qualifies as real user involvement. Some agencies have made half-hearted efforts along this road, but most have not. Overall, too little attention has been paid to the development of sophisticated measures of quality, while too much attention has been given to cost cutting as a supposed answer. The arbitrary and obligatory 1·5 per cent. or 1 per cent. saving while maintaining efficiency demonstrates the emphasis that has been placed on cost cutting.

Morale in the agencies is not high everywhere. In what remains of the rest of the civil service, there is a widespread feeling that agencies are being introduced at a rate that may destroy the impartiality and integrity of civil servants, along with their dedication to quality of work and service to the public.

At the end of the day, civil servants are at the sharp end: it is they who deliver the service. Their views should count when it comes to determining the ways in which services should be delivered. Unfortunately, their views are not taken into account. No amount of window dressing can make the quality of service better at the point of delivery. If the window dressing consists of glossy brochures that promise the earth but fail to deliver, it is worthless.

The framework document that relates to the Passport Office refers to an

"appropriate level of fees to recover the full costs of providing these services."

I was not surprised when the Minister talked about differential charging, because that is the Government's theme. It means that, if someone can afford to pay, he will receive a first class service, while those who cannot afford to pay will get a second class service. That applies to the hospital service and education, and the theme is now the same for the civil service. There is the triumph of political dogma over the provision of a proper service for all our people.

The aims, functions and objectives set out in the framework document that relate to the Passport Agency would be rewritten by a Labour Government. There is far too much secrecy in the executive agencies. In some agencies, the corporate and business plans are confidential documents. These include the Building Research Establishment, the Central Office of Information, the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Companies House, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, the Land Registry, the Meteorological Office, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Warren Spring Laboratory.

There are other agencies in which either the business plan or the corporate plan is a confidential document. There are examples where the personnel management memorandum, or its equivalent, is a confidential document. Such examples include the Central Office of Information, the Information Technology Services Agency, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist and the Meteorological Office. Why is there such secrecy in these agencies?

The Minister made great play of the claim that the unions are always consulted. If they are consulted, let them have copies of the documents to which I have referred—and let the House have copies as well.

At the end of the day, I believe that the Government want privatisation. I do not believe that they will be content with administrative change. That ultimate goal is an immoral goal. Information must be made available to the general public, and services must be provided at a price that the public can afford, and guarantees cannot be given under privatisation. If services become a charge on democracy, we shall be treading a dangerous road.

If anyone is in doubt about eventual privatisation, I shall reinforce my argument by the use of a few quotations. The next steps report says that ultimately some agencies may no longer be within the civil service. On 24 October 1988, the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), stated:

"I cannot rule out, however, that after a period of years, agencies, like other Government activities, may be suitable for privatisation."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. *14*.]

I note that some Conservative Members are nodding. I hope that that will be reported in *Hansard*.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he and the Labour party are utterly opposed in principle to the privatisation of all the departments in question, whatever the merits of the argument for taking that course, or is he saying that some departments, such as the Public Record Office, might merit privatisation?

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman must mention a few merits. Perhaps we can discuss merits when he comes to contribute to the debate. He may wish to develop the theme. I shall be interested to hear exactly what he has to say.

I shall quote Mr. Peter Middleton, the then permanent secretary to the Treasury, who gave evidence in 1988 to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. I refer to the second volume of the Committee's eighth report, in which Mr. Middleton is reported as saying:

"becoming an agency may be a step to privatisation later; it is all part of getting a more commercial attitude."

There we have it. Mr. Middleton added:

"I think this is particularly true of the various trading funds".

Last week, the Minister said:

"We have never said that 'next steps' . . . is necessarily the end of the road. It is right that some parts of the civil service should be considered for contractorisation and that other parts should be considered as candidates for privatisation."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1991; Vol.106, c. 17.]

That is in line with the Fraser report and with the next steps initiative in respect of a wholesale contracting out of the support services.

I believe that the Government have a hidden agenda, and it will be interesting to see whether they are honest enough to make it public to the civil service, and to say that, if they win the next general election, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Passport Office, Ordnance Survey, the Meteorological Office and the DVLC will be on a list of likely privatisations. Perhaps the Minister will give a straightforward answer when he winds up, because that would be welcome, one way or the other.

The problem with commercialisation of the kind advocated in the Fraser report was cited by the chief executive—as I mentioned when the right hon. Gentleman who is a Member for a midlands constituency intervened earlier in my speech.

Sir Norman Fowler: I represent the constituency of Sutton Coldfield.

Dr. Marek: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for reminding me.

Mr. Renton: What a disgraceful lack of knowledge.

Dr. Marek: The Minister may say that, but I come from Wales, and from such areas the midlands look rather far away.

The Fraser report provides for an enabling of the chief executive. The Minister is said to be in a "quasi-contractual relationship" with the chief executive. That phrase was first coined by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, but it is rather an unfortunate one. I should not wish for anything but that the chief executive should be completely responsible to the relevant Minister. A "quasi-contractual relationship" could be the first step in breaking that link and could lead to privatisation later. That is why agencies were first introduced.

When Labour is elected to office, we shall make certain arguments for agencies. One is that they can provide Parliament with a better insight into their activities, as well as better services. However, agencies require fairly rewarded, properly trained and highly motivated staff. They also need boards of management with staff representation.

Mr. Allason: The hon. Gentleman means union representation.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman has got it in one. Agencies need a clear statement of the policies under which they operate, and clear service quality targets that can regularly be met.

[Dr. Marek]

The Fraser report does not argue for any of those. It is time-locked in a web of political dogma, which has surrounded agencies since they were first established. The next Labour Government will lay that aside, and the next steps project manager will be given another job.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I am somewhat astonished by the hon. Gentleman's remark that dogma has surrounded the agencies since they were first established. On the contrary, the general feeling is of all-party agreement that there is a strong case for going along the agency route. I find it strange that the hon. Gentleman is taking the line that he is.

Dr. Marek: There is no case for going along the route of the Fraser report. I do not accuse the right hon. Gentleman of indulging in political dogma: I accuse the Government. There is a case for changing the nature of the agencies so that they provide for fairly paid, well trained and highly motivated staff—but that is not guaranteed, and it is unlikely to come about, if the spectre of privatisation looms over the heads of many civil servants working in the agencies.

If privatisation is on the cards—I firmly believe it is—the possibilities are endless. I suppose that someone would have to tell Sid, and then the Government could use the profits to make more tax cuts for the benefit of the rich, instead of sharing out the benefits to all. That would be another waste of resources on the scale of North sea oil.

The Government seek to develop a leaner, fitter civil service. We all know what happened to the economy. The Government began their term in office with one recession and are leaving it with another. The Government were supposed to cultivate a leaner and fitter industrial base, but we know what confronts manufacturing industry today. We are again in a recession, and there is no fat to cut. Are further cuts and more privatisation what the nation needs? I do not think so for a moment.

Agencies would be very different under a Labour Government. The present Government may succeed in putting a gloss on the surface of the many problems confronting the Civil Service, but if it cannot deliver, the gloss will fade, and we shall be left with the dull fragments of what was once a proud service—and that would be a tragedy. It is high time that the Government called a general election, so that Labour can start to repair the damage.

5.54 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): When I had the privilege of being Minister of State in the Privy Council Office, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) was Opposition spokesman on civil service matters. I enjoyed our exchanges, but he appeared to be in a confused state of mind as to the purpose behind the creation of executive agencies. I confess to failing to convince the hon. Gentleman of their value. Even more confusing today is that the hon. Member for Wrexham does not appear to have consulted the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) or his hon. Friends on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee—all of whom now appear strongly to support the principle of executive agencies.

The hon. Gentleman also does not seem to understand the purposes of the agencies, which are to improve the quality of service given to the public and give the taxpayer better value for money. That is what most concerns the Government. One of the side effects of providing an even better service will inevitably be greater job satisfaction within the civil service—so, of course, there are spin-off benefits. However, the Government's first concern is to improve the quality of the service.

Having given evidence to the Select Committee over four or five years, sometimes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and sometimes to the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), I am relieved to serve now as one of its members—as poacher-turned-gamekeeper—in order that I may continue to take an interest. There is no shadow of doubt about the scale and importance of the reforms.

The public's perception of the civil service has been moulded by the long-running television series, "Yes Minister", and they still believe that the mandarins tell Ministers precisely what to do and what to say, and that they really run the Government.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): They do.

Sir Richard Luce: My hon. Friend says that there is some truth in that belief. However, I will tell him that, within two weeks of my becoming Minister of State in the Privy Council Office, Paul Eddington came to see me, not about civil service matters but about the arts. I grew rather confused by the case that he was making, so I asked him to pause for a moment and to clarify a particular point. I asked him, "Is this what you really mean?" There was a long pause and eventually he answered, "Yes Minister." That led me to believe that I had not quite asserted my authority in the office, but I trust that I did so after that.

My right hon. Friend the Minister effectively explained that we have come a long way since the significant Northcott-Trevelyan reforms of the last century, which provided for fair and open competition, promotion on merit, professional standards, service loyal to the elected Government of the day, and impartial in that sense. Those principles remain. Sir Charles Trevelyan referred to

"sickly youths whose parents and friends endeavour to obtain for them service in the employment of the Government as a soft option leading to an early public pension."

His purpose was to change the climate and to establish those standards of fair and open competition, and of loyalty to the elected Government, that have survived to the present day.

Recent years have seen the publication of the Plowden and Fulton reports, both of which referred to the need to improve civil service management which was badly lacking. That led in the early 1980s to the delegation of management responsibilities through the financial management initiative, and from there to the Ibbs report, which pointed out that 95 per cent. of the people who serve in the home civil service are dealing with the provision of services to customers of one kind or another, which is highly significant and interesting in itself. Ibbs advocated, as my right hon. Friend the Minister stressed, the need to delegate responsibility. The more that one delegates the more likely one is to achieve better management of resources, better value for money, better accountability and clearer targets, all of which are necessary to help us to improve the quality of the service.

The reforms are crucial and therefore we are talking not merely about the quantity of money available to public services, but about how we can more effectively improve existing services with given levels of resources. I am glad that, despite the speech by the hon. Member for Wrexham, there is bipartisan support for the principle of delegation of responsibility—or I should like to believe that that is the case.

Our first duty is to the taxpayers and to the customers that we serve—in most cases they are one and the same. Today we have a chance to take stock of the two reports, the so-called Fraser report and the Price Waterhouse report of March this year, which reviewed the way in which the agencies are progressing. There are now 50 agencies with 210,000 civil servants, and another 23 candidates for agency status. There is growing staff enthusiasm for the existence of the agencies and, therefore, more job satisfaction. It is just under three years since the first agency was created—the Vehicles Inspectorate—and we are beginning to see the first signs of improved performance and better customer service. The fact that so many of the agencies carry out customer surveys is a sign of an attitude of mind that is changing fast and of a different cultural approach.

I strongly support and commend the work of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and I am sure that he would allow me to congratulate Mr. Kemp, the project manager, who has given admirable momentum to the implementation of those significant reforms.

I refer especially to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in *Hansard* last week, when he referred to the need to ensure that agencies

"select and set suitably robust and meaningful targets covering quality of service, financial performance and efficiency; and call chief executives to account for the performance."

He stressed that

"This means strategic advice and direction"—

from the Minister, but—

"not day-to-day involvement."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. *248*.]

That is an important statement of the way in which we have to continue.

I stress the importance of delegation of authority. The key to success is to delegate authority for the management of resources to chief executives, and thereby to the team that serves under him. Of course, overall financial control must be imposed from the Treasury, the Government and the Department. We must agree on overall resources and then delegate the day-to-day operation to the chief executive.

I noticed in the Fraser report a strong reference to the experience of the private sector and to the value and the need to delegate as much as possible, setting clear guidelines from the centre, but leaving the chief executive to get on with the job, which will be crucial to success. The Fraser report also stresses that we must untie support services to enable better value for money and that we must reduce the number of headquarters staff in the personnel and financial divisions. If one is delegating authority one cannot need so many people at the centre.

As part of the delegation process, those executive agencies must have more freedom to decide how it is best to proceed as regards flexibility on pay and the provision of performance bonuses. The second aspect of the problem is performance targets, which are crucial. The House, on behalf of the country, must be able to judge the performance, progress, value for money and quality of the service provided by agencies, through clearly established targets for quality, financial matters and efficiency.

We are beginning to have evidence from the Vehicles Inspectorate, from HMSO, Companies House and others of improved services and of better value for money. The House has a singularly important part to play in that regard and I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State stressed accountability to the House and the right of Select Committees—not merely the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, but also departmental Select Committees—to summon chief executives to enable them to account to the House for their performance and to allow hon. Members to challenge them.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) is a strong believer in the legislature challenging the performance of the Executive and that is the purpose of the exercise and what Select Committees should be doing. Good chief executives should welcome that opportunity to get across their achievements.

There is no uniformity in the system of executive agencies and nor should there be. Each agency is a different size and type and they should be tailor-made for requirements. Some agencies run on gross running costs, some on net running costs and others on trading fund status. It depends on the nature of the agency and how far it can be run on commercial or semi-commercial lines.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Wrexham goes on about privatisation. The Government's approach is quite straightforward. If the service is better suited to privatisation and thereby a better quality of service is provided, that is the first option. If it is considered that that is not the case, the next option is for it to go to an agency. In due course, it may turn out to be more suitable for it to be run on a privatised basis and I believe that that will be the case with the National Engineering Laboratory. The key question that we must ask ourselves is what is the best means of improving the quality of service to the public and getting the best value for money? That is the first and only question that we should ask ourselves.

I am glad that there was an open competition system for half of the first 34 agencies. It is important to establish that principle across the board, so that we have the opportunity to recruit the best chief executives to run the agencies, whether from the private sector or from the civil service, and we must move towards that, although I am glad that 14 chief executives come from outside the service. The executives appointed from inside the service are certainly of very high quality.

Finally, I must stress the interplay between management and policy advisers, as it is crucial for there to be a constant interchange between the two. The quality of the advice given by policy advisers to Ministers will be enhanced by their having had management experience in the agencies. However complex it may be to provide that, it is absolutely essential to the success of the service, and I strongly advocate that we consider ways in which we can ensure that people move from one to the other.

We must never lose sight of our main objectives in this exciting and major reform of the civil service this century: better service for the public and better value for money. In the process, we will achieve an even more professional and dedicated service, which will do an even better job.

6.7 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I welcome this debate but, frankly, it is long overdue. It is a pity that it should be taking place three years after the agency reforms started. Perhaps it is also a pity that it is taking place in the run-up to a general election.

I shall begin by referring to the involvement of the Sub-Committee of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and thanking the Minister of State for his words. As we can see from this debate, bureaucracy-watching has always been a minority sport. Like the mandarins themselves, Members of Parliament are usually much more comfortable with policy issues than with questions of management; but I, and I think many hon. Members in the Select Committee, thought that the next steps changes were far too important to be left to the Executive alone, and that there should be a parliamentary input.

The Sub-Committee, under the auspices of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee—I am glad that its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), is present—was involved from the start. We held annual hearings on the developments in the next steps programme. We have issued three reports, and we shall hold further hearings in the next month or so. We hope to give our fourth report to the House before the summer recess. The Select Committee's close involvement in a major bureaucratic change is, arguably, unique in the relationship between Parliament and the Executive.

The Select Committee has called the next steps initiative "the most ambitious attempt at civil service reform in the 20th century",
which I think is right. The changes could affect not only 75 per cent. of the civil service, but also the way in which a wide variety of essential services are delivered to the public. It is very much in the nation's interest that these services are delivered with maximum efficiency. As we said, "a well-managed state is in the interests of all its citizens." Surely that can be agreed between the parties.

The agency idea has not come out of the blue. It should have been mentioned—I do not think it was—that it is built on the Fulton idea of accountable units. It was pointed out in the Fraser committee report that there is a straight connection with the Fulton committee, which was set up by the Labour Government in the 1960s. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) is present, as he played a distinguished part in drawing up that committee's report. The Fulton committee concluded that, to function effectively, members of large organisations, including Departments, should have authority, unitedly and individually. It was essential, in Fulton's view, that that authority should be clearly defined and that civil servants have responsibilities for which they can be held accountable.

The Ibbs report used the Fulton concept as a basis for proposing the policy of devolved agencies to handle the majority of the Government's business. So far, the next steps reforms have got off to a pretty good start. Since 1988, 50 agencies will have been set up by the end of the year. The next steps programme will apply to nearly half the civil servants by the end of the year.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) that it is too early to make a considered assessment. It would be foolish for us to do so, because some agencies, especially the biggest and most controversial such as the Employment Agency or the Social Security Benefits Agency, are only just up and running, and are still in their infancy. However, the next steps changes are beginning to prove their worth.

I should like to pay tribute to the project manager. He and his team have done a good job on their remit. It is not right to refer to the jobs of civil servants, who are acting under the instructions of Ministers, as though they are taking an independent initiative—they are not. Those who ask for a non-partisan civil service cannot, at the same time, say that we will sack or shift individual civil servants.

Mr. Batiste: Hear, hear.

Mr. Radice: That also applies to Conservative Members. In the past few years, under the premiership of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), many of us feared that the civil service was becoming politicised. Journalists talked of a "Thatcherite Satrapy" when referring to the civil service. Thank goodness that has not taken place, although people such as Sir Bernard Ingham behaved in a political way and should have been political appointments, as the Select Committee implied in its report. However, the civil service is still non-partisan. Its head has made it clear that he wants it to remain so, as has my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). It is not for us to criticise the actions of individual civil servants when they are acting under the instructions of Ministers.

I welcome the speech that was made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East to the Royal Institute of Public Administration. He said that an incoming Labour Government would not seek to reverse the changes made:

"I do not think that there would be merit in a new Government seeking to uproot all the plants in the garden, re-arrange their roots and then, having planted them again, expect them to grow well."

He is absolutely right. He also pointed out that the framework agreement, which sets out the responsibilities and duties of an agency, can be changed by an incoming Government. The agency idea is politically neutral. It is administrative technology that can be transmitted from one Government to the next. This key idea behind the agency reform was endorsed by the head of the civil service when he told us that transmission is a simple matter that is allowed for in a review of a framework agreement. The Labour party supports the agency reforms partly because we could change the framework agreement to allow objectives to reflect the values of an incoming Labour Government.

There is a wider message. If a Government are embarking on far-reaching changes, especially a change involving the civil service, it is essential to have consensus; otherwise the reforms are likely to be reversed by a successor Government. I hope that the Government take notice of what I am about to say: it would be extremely foolish if, having taken the trouble to set up civil service agencies, they then decided to embark on a programme of privatisation. It has been rumoured in newspapers that the Conservative party may do so if it wins the next election.

I hope that the Government do not want to privatise sitting agencies, and that the Minister's vague words meant that they would not do so. Such a development would undermine the undoubted consensus on next steps, and could endanger the success of the reforms.

Mr. Renton: I take the hon. Gentleman's points about the consensus. For that reason, I paid tribute to the work

of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which included the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). However, is there consensus in the Labour party on this matter?

I read the speech made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) with much interest. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) gave me the strong impression that he was distancing himself from the next steps process. That shows the great divide on this matter in the Labour party.

Mr. Radice: My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham made it clear that he was in favour of the agency reforms, but that, under a Labour Government, they would take a different shape. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the framework agreement allows that to happen, because the objectives of an agency can be changed. Different people may put their words differently. As I said, it is a pity that this debate is taking place in the run-up to a general election. That is the fault not of my hon. Friend, but of the Government, who have delayed the debate, despite our telling them many years ago not to do so.

If the Minister is trying to maintain the consensus, it would be foolish of him to stir the party political pot. I advise him not to do so.

Mr. Renton: The intra party political pot.

Mr. Radice: I have not done that. The Minister should not look a gift horse in the mouth. He should accept support, wherever it comes from and not complain, because he is quite lucky.

In supporting the next steps reforms, I am not hiding the fact that there are major problems of implementation; we must accept that. Some of the problems were covered in the three reports of the Select Committee, and some were covered in the recently published Fraser report, which the Select Committee will want to consider. It will want to take evidence from Sir Angus Fraser. He has said —we have said so, too—that clear framework agreements are required. Some of those agreements are not yet clear enough on objectives, duties and responsibilities.

Within the agreement, management must have sufficient independence, because that is the point of the agency reform. At the same time, the management must be made accountable and the only way to do that is to have proper performance indicators. However, performance indicators are in their infancy. We do not have a fully developed sense of what they should be, and in particular, we have not established sufficient output indicators. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South is an expert on such matters, and I look forward very much to his remarks.

It should not be a question of cost cutting. As we said in our latest report, we should like some of the benefits to be invested in improved services to the general public. I agree that the appointment of good chief executives is absolutely key, and that it should normally be done by open competition. I am glad to see that that point was endorsed by the Fraser report.

The role and size of core Departments is another problem, epecially as it is likely that there will be job losses within them. It would be foolish to pretend that that will not create great difficulties. The role of the Treasury and whether it supports the agency idea is an issue: I hope it does, but I am not absolutely certain. There is a need for a monitoring unit over and above the project team to consider developments, to assess whether we are fragmenting the civil service too much and whether we are creating agencies without any general co-ordinating principles.

The nature of the civil service is also an issue. What sort of civil service will remain once all the separate agencies have been created? Will the heads of the agencies be able to become policy advisers? We do not yet know. I believe that they ought to, but I do not know what will happen. These are tricky and important issues, and we shall consider them and others in our report to the House before the summer recess.

The next steps reforms raise in an extreme form the problem of how civil servants are to be made accountable for their actions to Parliament. The classic formula of exclusive ministerial responsibility has, for many years, proved unsatisfactory as a means of ensuring the accountability of civil servants. The range of Government business is so extensive that no single Minister will know in detail everything within his Department. Hence the growing number of appearances of civil servants before Select Committees, which I welcome. That has become such a special feature of parliamentary life that we have a rather esoteric set of Government rules governing the appearance of civil servants—I think that they are called the Osmotherley rules.

The next steps reforms create a new dilemma. The chief executive will be given specific operational responsibility by the framework agreement, but the Minister will remain responsible for the overall terms of the agreement. For example, if an hon. Member wishes to take up an operational matter with the Minister, he or she will be referred to the head of the agency. That seems logical. Ever since I have been a Member of Parliament, I have taken up social security cases directly with the local office manager. That is the most efficient way in which to get answers, and that is the way I have always operated. However, until now I have always been able to refer the matter to the Minister if I am not satisfied with the local manager's reply. That is a weapon available to hon. Members, but they will not have it in future, because the Minister will always say that the matter is one for the agency under the framework agreement. Our questions will be referred to the agency, and we will have no recourse to the Minister even if the problem raises wider issues. The House will have to consider that matter carefully and the Select Committee will have to consider it carefully in our coming report.

There are also different issues with the Select Committees. Originally, we recommended that chief executives should give evidence directly on their own behalf to the Select Committees. We were told that that was a matter for overall ministerial responsibility, and the Government proposed a compromise whereby Ministers remained formally responsible but, in practice, agency heads answered for their delegated responsibilities. That seems a sensible approach. It is also welcome that chief executives, such as agency accounting officers, are financially responsible to the Public Accounts Committee. But these changes put pressure on Select Committees, and I question whether they are in a good enough position to carry out their responsibilities.

Select Committees have been slow to question chief executives. Part of the problem is that we do not yet have a generally accepted set of performance indicators, so it becomes difficult to ask meaningful questions about the work of agencies. If the performance indicators can be

[Mr. Radice]

developed, perhaps the Select Committees will be in a stronger position. It is important that those Committees can make chief executives responsible for their stewardship.

We must learn as we go along. Accountability is in its infancy, but there is a strong case for arguing that parliamentary accountability of agencies will need to be supplemented by a strengthened system of administrative justice, a more powerful ombudsman and a freedom of information Act.

Mr. Allason: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: No, because there is very little time.

Next steps is a promising reform and hon. Members, particularly those on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, have a responsibility to see that it succeeds.

6.26 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): One of the clear lessons of the Government's successful privatisation programme in the 1980s was that people freed from the constraints of the governmental system were then often able to make dramatic transformations in the quality of services and the effectiveness of the organisations that they ran. Some executive functions of Government are not now suitable for privatisation and they may not be in the longer term. But we must consider the lessons of the privatisation programme for the structure of government and implement the reforms that will enable similar improvements to be made even if the process falls short of full privatisation.

We should ask ourselves how the interests of customers and good management can be met within the overall and inevitable constraints of the governmental system. We must shift the focus of the managers of governmental executive responsibilities away from looking to their backs, in order to shelve responsibility, and passing on those responsibilities higher up the civil service—almost always ultimately to the Treasury. Instead, we should refocus their attention on giving a better service to their customers and better value for money.

Until I heard the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), I had understood that the next steps agencies had widespread support as the right way forward. When the hon. Gentleman reads his speech, he may find that the balance of it gave a different impression, even though some of his remarks undoubtedly suggested support for the principle of the next steps agencies. The Government have an ambitious programme—by 1992, 50 per cent. of civil servants will work in agencies and, in the longer term, the objective is for 90 per cent. of civil servants to work in agencies. Such an ambitious programme will succeed only if it has the widest support among all parties.

My particular interest was focused on 26 April this year, when I, with a number of others, had the privilege of going to the forensic science laboratories at Wetherby on the occasion of the official launch of its next steps agency. Of course, there was trepidation—anybody facing major changes in the way in which his organisation is structured and run will inevitably look to the future with a measure of trepidation—but I found great enthusiasm for the freedom that the people felt that they now had in the running of their affairs. I was particularly heartened by the way in which the members of the forensic science service, as well as their major customers—the police force—talked about how the service could be improved, how the police could get better value for money and how the detection of crime could be advanced. That is what this process is all about.

How can the process be advanced more generally? Clearly, the maximum devolution of authority downwards is necessary. With that must go the maximum possible devolution of budgets. The provision of incentives for success—however one may phrase that—is an integral part of the process. If there are not rewards for success, the temptation to go for the easy life will always be great.

It is important that support services should be fully costed and that the managers of these agencies should be free to shop around for the best value. There must be tough auditing and complaints procedures. I refer not just to accountability to the House, to which the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) referred, but to accountability to the public. The public need a strong complaints procedure, with a view to ensuring that, at their end, the objectives of the next steps agencies are properly fulfilled. Clearly, inherent in that are strong, published performance targets. These targets change from time to time; they are indeed moving targets. Clearly, the agencies, as they develop in certain directions, will find new objectives on which they must focus.

As other hon. Members want to take part in this debate, I shall heed your strictures about brevity, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall refrain from referring to many of the fascinating subjects that have been raised in the debate. Suffice it to say that the great political debate of the 1990s will focus on the way in which public services can be made more effective, with a view to delivering better value for money and better service for the people for whom they are intended. The core of that debate is in the citizens' charter proposals that the Prime Minister has floated. Many of the proposals at the core of the citizens' charter are now being developed, extended and experimented with in the next steps agencies. As those agencies succeed, so will the whole process of providing better services for the public.

6.32 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I must confess that I have mixed feelings about next steps agencies, as I had a hand in their origin. Twenty-four years ago, a group of which I was a member reported to the Fulton committee that Departments should be divided into budget centres; executive areas with measurable output, which we now call agencies; and responsibility centres handling legislative policy and ministerial support work, which are now called core departments. As a result, Fulton produced a definitive text on agencies. Paragraph 150 of the Fulton report says that the achievement of accountable management

"depends upon identifying or establishing accountable units within government departments—units where output can be measured against costs or other criteria, and where individuals can be held personally responsible for their performance."

Of course, because of bitter Treasury opposition those ideas came to nothing.

The concept next surfaced in a Fabian tract written in 1973 by myself and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), in which we proposed the widespread establishment of departmental agencies. This tract was called—believe it or not—"Administrative

Reform: The Next Step". The present agencies go much further than we had in mind. We never believed that, on such an issue, the Treasury could be so effectively handbagged. Like Fulton, we saw departmental agencies as bodies that would develop better information and budgetary systems and would enable the development of a cadre of professional top managers in the civil service. The main aim of Fulton, in constructing accountable management, was to break the power of the mandarins —the Oxbridge public school classicists and historians who ran the civil service—and replace them with managers. Unfortunately, that aim has never been fulfilled, and top management in the civil service is as socially and educationally exclusive as ever.

The reason agencies have made such rapid headway is that they were seen as a vehicle for cutting civil service costs by giving agency chief executives a strong incentive, through performance pay, to reduce staff numbers and by ending service-wide agreements on pay and conditions. The idea was to locate agencies in low-pay areas, and then pay their staffs at the local going-rate.

The document that heralded agencies in 1988 was a slight and inexpert piece of work—16 pages of assertions, and no analysis. This is what it says about Parliament:

"Pressure from Parliament, the Public Accounts Committee and the media tends to concentrate on alleged impropriety or incompetence, and making political points, rather than on demanding evidence of steadily improving efficiency and effectiveness."

I thought at the time that that was a gratuitous and ignorant observation, given all the efforts that all of us make every day of our lives, in the House and on the Select and Standing Committees, to demand improved performance by Departments. We have certainly never been offered it, and we have never secured it except by relentless pressure. Yet, here we have this dismissive attitude to our work in Parliament.

The first wave of these partly independent non-governmental organisations—"PINGOs"—is now three years old. Their role, responsibilities, objectives and targets are supposed to be specified in framework documents. The early ones were all in relatively non-controversial areas: quasi-commercial work, where a framework document is not difficult to draw up, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, the Meteorological Office, the royal parks, research institutions, vehicle licensing, and so on. The only one in the first wave which was in an area of social policy was the Resettlement Agency, existing to provide board and lodging for persons without a settled way of life. The framework document for that body should have been a rather subtle instrument, but it did not even mention the size of the problem with which it had to deal, or what it proposed to do for its clients. Its only target was to abolish itself.

Now, a number of agencies are involved in social policy, having joined the Resettlement Agency. The largest of these has to do with social security benefits. They raise much more significant matters of public policy and parliamentary accountability. Decisions affecting thousands of our constituents have been handed over to a subsidiary of the Department of Social Security. Now we have the Fraser report, which raises more questions than it answers. I should like to put to the Minister a number of direct questions arising from it.

The first question concerns the treatment of staff. I have here three letters sent last month by the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service to the Council of Civil Service Unions. I shall leave the Minister sufficient time to reply to the questions that have been put to him, and I hope that he will answer this point. The effect of the letters from the officer to the council is to deregulate annual reporting, deregulate promotion procedures and deregulate redundancy procedures. In effect, they abandon long-established redundancy agreements. More civil servants are being made redundant than at any time since the 1950s. Is it the intention to abandon all staff agreements on conditions of service in agencies? Paragraph 2.8 of the Fraser report proposes to give chief executives freedom to manage staff and resources in all areas, with a few specified exceptions. What are the exceptions? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question.

Secondly, we come to the framework documents, which are clearly crucial to the management of agencies and to which several hon. Members referred. Paragraph 2.4 of the Fraser report says that there should be agency targets and that they should measure financial performance, efficiency —both of which mean cost cutting—and the quality of customer service. Why does it not mention effectiveness in reaching out to those who could benefit from the services? Is it not the job of the Social Security Benefits Agency to increase benefit take-up rates? Is it not the job of the Training Agency to reach those people who need training but are not getting it? Will those targets be set?

So far, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has had two entirely different answers from two different Ministers on that point. When the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, now the Chancellor, was asked whether it was legitimate for the new Social Security Benefits Agency to try to increase the take-up of benefits, he said:

"I would not see that as a feature."

When asked the same question, the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce), then Minister for the Civil Service, said:

"In principle 'yes' and they are perfectly entitled to set that as a target."

What is the truth?

Thirdly, the Fraser report refers to cuts in headquarters staff of some 25 per cent. It quotes reductions in industry, under a similar devolutionary approach, of some 50 per cent. Those cuts will come in personnel and finance divisions, which happen to be the two places where civil service management is weakest. The report even talks about redefining the size and role of the Treasury and the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service. I never thought that I would see a Government report on "downsizing" the Treasury.

What is the size of that group in the civil service which is to be reduced? In the 30 main departments, it can hardly involve fewer than 100,000 staff members, virtually all working in London and living in the capital and its suburbs. When will they go? Will they suffer from deregulated redundancy arrangements?

Fourthly, it is the aim of the Fraser report to devolve personnel work from the centre and from the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service to the individual agencies. The Office of the Minister for the Civil Service will be cut, as I assume that the Minister will seek to set an example by reducing headquarters staff. When personnel work has been devolved, what will happen to central equal opportunities initiatives? There are no members of ethnic minority groups in the civil service in grades 1, 2 or 3 and

[Mr. John Garrett]

only five in grade 4. Women form 48 per cent. of civil service staff. They form 74 per cent. of the lowest clerical grade but 5 per cent. of grades 1 to 4. How will those problems be addressed when the civil service is a collection of 100 small businesses, with no power at the centre to impose equal opportunities guidelines?

Fifthly, why is the civil service still regulated by Order in Council—the royal prerogative? Surely it is obvious that we need a civil service Act to govern the employment and conditions of civil servants. The royal prerogative was used to deny civil servants trade union rights at GCHQ. A civil service Act should define the duties of civil servants to serve the Crown rather than the Government of the day. It should also define the rights of civil servants to belong to trade unions and the duties of an accounting officer. At present, the accounting officer memorandum, which lays down the responsibilities of permanent heads of department, has no legal standing. The only statutes that apply to an accounting officer are those under the National Audit Act 1983.

Will the terms and conditions of service of civil servants be legislated for, or will they continue to be governed by royal proclamation? Will the civil service continue to be an entity? If it ends up as 100 agencies and 20 or 30 core departments, there will have to be an active and professional department for the civil service at the centre. Surely there is no question but that the arts and the civil service should be combined in the portfolio of one Minister. That shows what the Government think of the arts and the civil service. It is a ridiculous combination.

Which of the agencies will be privatised? I happen to have two in my constituency—Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. Having joined the civil service, my constituents should like to know how many of them will end up working for private companies. The two agencies which I mentioned are sufficiently commercial to be chosen for privatisation. If there were a list of forthcoming privatisations, as I am sure that there is, right at the top would be HMSO—so long as the Government could find a way to subsidise parliamentary documents—and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

The Government boast of efficiency but, when one studies the background to their recent policies, one sees extraordinary inefficiency and huge cost of administration in relation to returns. The poll tax, the social fund, student grants and chasing errant fathers for maintenance are examples of such policies. There has never been legislation with such a low benefit-to-cost ratio. Civil service policy is not the only example of retrogression. Recently, there has been a growth in quangos. I remember when the Government were a great hunter of quangos but nowadays, instead of talking quangos, we have spending ones carrying out training, regulating gas, water and electricity and controlling pollution. Few of those expensive quangos are accountable to Parliament. Will the Minister explain their accountability?

Agencies are neutral. They can be used by a Labour Government for advancing the conditions of the people and for providing better services to the customer.

Alternatively, they can be used to cut costs—as these agencies will be used. They may be like HMSO or the Charities Commission. Under the Government, they will drive down the living standards of their workers and will not actively seek to improve their services. If anything, they make worse the real problem of the civil service—its divisions on grounds of social class. It is still overwhelmingly dominated by mandarins. The cadre of the permanent sector is now more socially exclusive than it was in 1900. In last year's fast-stream entry, 55 per cent. of entrants had Oxbridge arts degrees and one came from a polytechnic. The Government have made no impact on that problem.

The tradition of the gentleman amateur in top management in British Government has done our country incalculable harm. It is a tradition that is indifferent to quantitative analysis, management and junior staff. That is the real problem in the civil service, and the Government have done nothing to broaden the formation of senior civil servants. Agencies are irrelevant to that problem and, although they could be used to improve quality, the Government will use them to cut costs. Under a Labour Government, they would be used to improve the quality of service, particularly in social policy, to outreach the service to potential customers, who now receive no service at all.

6.47 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The question that the Opposition must answer on their ambiguous approach to this issue is whether they believe in putting first the interests of staff or those of the consumer. Next steps seeks to attain a complete change in culture within the civil service. Every hon. Member knows that dealing with the civil service—whether it is a matter of trying to get a passport in time or a replacement driving licence—is like dealing with a brick wall. We are trying to achieve a dramatic change.

A welcome change has been made in the driver vehicle licensing centre, and the results of Her Majesty's Stationery Office are gradually being improved. The Meteorological Office also shows every sign of improvement, and Ordnance Survey and Companies House have taken great initiatives.

The Public Record Office is a prime candidate for privatisation. It is a marvellous national asset that should be exploited. I find it offensive when people come to me, having studied documents in the Public Record Office, and ask why documents from the first world war are still classified "top secret" and not available. There should be an immediate change to the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967 to allow the privatisation of the Public Record Office. We should be able to give the public far better service. They should be allowed to see all documents, unless there is a genuine national security consideration or somebody's life could be put at risk by premature disclosure.

The Public Record Office is a national asset. A good precedent for privatisation was when the BBC decided that it was also a national asset, with tremendous software programming. At one stage, only three people were working in the New York office of BBC Enterprises. It is now a major organisation, working to the great benefit of the BBC.

The Public Record Office is sitting on a veritable goldmine, yet it supplies absolutely free, although not entirely good, service, not just to the British public but to American academics and researchers from overseas. I should like to see the genuine exploitation of all the material. The Government and civil service should ensure

that they fully respect the 30-year rule. All material should go from Government Departments to the Public Record Office without being shredded. After 30 years, all that material should become completely available to readers of the Public Record Office. That would mean charging consumers and exploiting a priceless asset and would end the abuse and secrecy surrounding the Public Record Office.

People do not realise that, not only are several Government Departments excluded from the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, which means that Government Departments do not have to supply documents to the PRO; material is sent to the PRO after it has been what is euphemistically known as "weeded" by the civil service, and that material also remains closed. There are vast corridors of documents in the PRO that are entirely secret. At present, the PRO conspires with the Lord Chancellor's Office to ensure that that material is never seen by the public. That is a deplorable conspiracy. I should like to see something along the lines of a Freedom of Information Act or a change in the Public Records Acts to enable people—the taxpayers—to be able to see that material.

There is a great principle in the United States: if material has been paid for by the taxpayer, he is entitled to see it. Unfortunately, on this side of the Atlantic, we subscribe to the culture whereby material is not made available to the taxpayer because, if it were, it would mean that, heaven forbid, the civil service would be held accountable for the views and advice it gives to Ministers. That is the key to the culture of secrecy in this country, which a simple change to the Public Record Office or an aggressive approach to next steps could change. The retention of documents in the PRO is absurd.

This week has seen the anniversary of the arrival in this country of Rudolf Hess. How odd it is that, if one wants to read the true account of what happened to Rudolf Hess, one has to go to the national archives in America and pay 15 cents a sheet or to Dzerzhinski square in Moscow and ask the KGB for its version of the documents. They are available in both those places, but the British version of the documents is entirely secret.

If we were to take an aggressive approach to the privatisation of the Public Record Office and impose a 50-year rule, which would satisfy people on the national security grounds of retaining particularly sensitive documents, we could now be reading the documents prepared by the security service in 1940 relating to alleged fifth columnists, pro-Nazis and people who were considered sympathetic to the Nazis in 1940 and a possible danger to the Government of this country.

The PRO is a priceless asset which should be exploited in exactly the same way as the BBC has exploited BBC Enterprises. The BBC has made marvellous programmes over many years. That software has become available and is a source of tremendous financial advantage to the BBC. We should like to see exactly the same thing happen to the PRO. The driver and vehicle licensing centre has just begun on that path by selling some number plates. The Ordnance Survey could do much the same thing and Companies House could follow suit by supplying fast information to consumers.

At the bottom of next steps, and what we are asking for, is not just a change of service, but a change of the culture of secrecy which has so shackled this country and worked to the disadvantage of taxpayers. I should like to see a change, not necessarily for the benefit of the staff of such organisations—many people believe that some of those organisations existed for the benefit of their staff, notably British Rail. We should take an aggressive approach to the next steps agencies which would work to the advantage of the taxpayer.

6.54 pm

Mr. Renton: This has been a useful debate, and I am glad that we have been able to arrange it, as the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee suggested. I particularly wish to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) for his wise speech, in which he drew on his extremely extensive knowledge of the subject. I am conscious that when he was in the office that I now hold, he oversaw the inception of the next steps policy from its beginnings. Now, as a member of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he will be able to see how that policy develops in practice. I am sure that the Select Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), will greatly benefit from the continuing interest and experience of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham in this subject.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham asked about transferring staff between agencies and policy areas. I thoroughly agree that such transfers are extremely important, and I hope that staff interchange will continue, both for staff development and for management needs. I hope that freedom in pay and personnel regimes, which will be increasingly flexible, will not be allowed to obstruct the transferability of which my right hon. Friend spoke.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) for his speech. I wholly agree that a major part of the political debate of the 1990s will concentrate on better public service for the ordinary, average citizen of the United Kingdom and, I hope, a continuing interesting career structure with flexibility of pay for all those working in the public service. That fits in with the citizens' charter, on which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already made a number of interesting comments and on which a White Paper will come before the House before the summer recess.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) was able to make a speech. I listened with interest to his not wholly unexpected remarks about the Public Record Office. I wholly agree with him about the need for better service to be the theme throughout the next steps agencies.

I thought that the comments of the hon. Members for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) were disappointing——

Mr. Radice: Come on.

Mr. Renton: It is no good the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) saying, "Come on," because in his saner moods—when he spoke tonight, he was in a good sane mood—he will realise precisely why I say that. The hon. Members for Wrexham and for Norwich, South reminded me of the old saying that none rowed fast, but none so fast as stroke. There is support for the agencies in principle and in detail from the Government and Opposition Back Benchers, as was shown by the hon. Member for Durham, North. There is none—or there is havering—from the hon. Members for Wrexham and for

[Mr. Renton]

Norwich, South, which is disappointing. I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) left the Chamber before being able to be reminded how much he is being let down by the two Opposition spokesmen.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South, despite his long-term interest in the subject, merely brought out the old sayings about mandarins and Oxbridge recruitment to the civil service. Why did he not give a single, constructive and intelligent comment about where the next steps initiative was going?

Mr. Radice: The Minister was not listening.

Mr. Renton: I was listening carefully, and I was extremely disappointed. I realise that the hon. Member for Wrexham does not know a great deal about the subject. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham said, the hon. Member for Wrexham has often shown confusion on the subject. But I expected more from the hon. Member for Norwich, South, who has served on the Select Committee for a long time. He merely trotted out all the old, trite phrases about next steps.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Renton: I shall not give way; I have only one minute left and I want to answer some of the points made——

Dr. Marek *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Dr. Marek *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Renton: I will not give way, because I want to answer some of the questions——

Dr. Marek *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please resume his seat?

Dr. Marek *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Renton: I wanted to answer some of the questions put by the hon. Member for Norwich, South as I was intending——

Dr. Marek *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is extremely bad behaviour.

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There can be no point of order. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for Ministers not to give way when they make personal attacks on hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Renton: We will carry the process forward with vigour, and I am sure that it will be supported by the civil service and by the whole country.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

7 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is promoted by London Underground Ltd. It was deposited in Parliament in November 1989. It was given a Second Reading in another place on 8 March 1990 and committed to an Opposed Private Bill Committee which first sat on 5 June 1990. Some 36 petitions were deposited against the Bill in the other place. The Committee adjourned its proceedings on 11 June to enable the promoters to make certain changes to the Bill as a result of a petition from the trustees of the Borough market. The Committee reconvened on 3 December and concluded on 18 December 1990. I pay tribute to my former colleague on the Greater London council, Baroness Gardner of Parkes, who piloted the Bill through the other place.

The Bill stemmed from the recommendations contained in the Fennell report into the fire at King's Cross. The report contained 157 recommendations. Recommendation No. 62 said:

"London Underground shall undertake an investigation of the problems of passenger flow and congestion in stations and take remedial action".

The purpose of the Bill is to give effect to that recommendation at three busy stations: London Bridge, Holborn and Tottenham Court Road. The measures are concerned with safety and the relief of passenger congestion, and aim to provide additional capacity for future growth at each station. Both elements are of great importance to Londoners.

Anyone who travels on the underground will have seen, as I have, the problems of congestion. The use of the underground increased rapidly during the 1980s. In 1981, there were 541 million journeys. In 1989 there were about 850 million—an increase of 57 per cent. Central London stations, already heavily used, became even busier. Usage increased by 38 per cent. during peak periods and by 53 per cent. over the day as a whole.

The three stations were constructed at a time of far lighter passenger flow and their features incorporate thinking on station design which is no longer acceptable, such as entrances to the ends of long, dead-end platforms —that is long platforms with the entrance and exit at one end—and limited space to deal with congestion and bottlenecks at the head and foot of escalators and stairways. The three stations have only one route to the street, although two independent means of escape other than by train are now required for new stations. The design of the stations coupled with the increased number of passengers mean that congestion is a regular occurrence.

For London Underground, congestion and safety problems go together. Congestion could, for example, lead to someone falling off the platform or could result in panic in an emergency. That is why the long title of the Bill is

"An Act . . . for safety purposes and the relief of passenger congestion".

In line with the Fennell recommendations, London Underground is carrying out a review of 30 stations and is studying the problems of safety and congestion. The three stations were given high priority for attention. At London Bridge, the platforms and access points to them were built in 1900. Over the past 20 years, use of the station has increased by 92 per cent. Under the Bill, the main work will be the construction of a new tunnel and line of railway which will enable the present southbound platform to be turned into a circulating area. As well as the existing station entrance, there will be a new ticket hall in Borough High street with escalator connections.

At Holborn, the present ticket hall was built in 1906 to serve the Piccadilly line. It was altered in 1933 when the Central line platforms were added. The station was used by about 35 million people in 1990, the figure having risen by about 50 per cent. since 1981. The ticket hall is small and is frequently closed for short periods on weekdays to avoid overcrowding. London Underground proposes to build an additional ticket hall beneath the junction of Southampton row and Theobalds road, and to build associated shafts and subways to the platforms below, which will provide an additional means of getting into and out of the station.

Tottenham Court Road has what everyone would agree is a remarkably small ticket hall, especially with the new ticketing machinery and with the safety measure of taking the machines back from the end of the escalator. The present ticket hall dates from 1929, and serves the Central and Northern lines. The hall is small, but it has to serve 35 million passengers annually. It is the sixth busiest station on the system and its use has grown by 51 per cent. between 1981 and 1989, leading to periods of closure as at Holborn. The main work at Tottenham Court Road station will be a new ticket hall at the corner of Oxford street and Tottenham Court road, with escalators to serve the Northern and Central lines and associated passageways to the platforms. That will improve passenger distribution and will give better access to Oxford street.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): My hon. Friend refers to escalators. Although I appreciate that he may need to get some information, can he tell us whether the escalators will be built to a standard pattern so that if there is a problem about repair a new escalator can be put in straight away? Or, as with so many London escalators, will they be purpose-built for each station? There is great difficulty in getting replacements made because each escalator is a one-off job.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has a background knowledge of these matters. When I was a member of the London Transport committee of the Greater London council, we specifically discussed escalators for the reasons that my hon. Friend has described. From my knowledge of that time, I realise that it is a difficult problem because of the unique way in which escalators have to be constructed. They often have to be carried in piece by piece through the ticket hall and then assembled. I note my hon. Friend's point and I will seek guidance. I may seek leave of the House to try to answer his question in due course.

The Bill is extremely important to London. Other hon. Members may want to raise important constituency matters. For my constituents and for those of other London Members, it is vital that the Bill is given a Second Reading without delay. I recommend the Bill to the House.

7.8 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I emphasise at the outset that I have no quarrel with the basic purpose of the Bill. The proposed works are entirely in line with the approach that was recommended for London Underground by the Fennell report following the tragedy of the fire at King's Cross. The improvements and the works leading to them which are set out in the Bill are worthwhile objectives.

I shall be brief in expressing my concern, which rests solely with clause 31, which effectively overrides the normal provisions of listed building protection for such buildings contained within the purview of any works relating to the Bill.

You will doubtless recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when the King's Cross Railways Bill, which was jointly promoted by British Rail and London Underground, first came before us, it contained a similar provision. It was a rather sweeping provision, removing any listed building consent requirements for any of the buildings within the purview of the Bill. The Department of the Environment, even at that first stage of the Bill, expressed its reservations about that clause. English Heritage attempted to petition against the Bill but was refused locus standi to do so. However, the Committee that considered the King's Cross Railways Bill quite rightly drew attention to that clause and demanded that British Rail and London Underground remove it.

That was an entirely appropriate response to an attempt, by means of a private Bill, to overturn the impact of primary legislation. Such an attempt should not be made through the private Bill procedure. The Department of the Environment, English Heritage and the Committee were entirely right to reach that judgment.

Sadly, neither British Rail nor London Underground seem to have learnt the lesson from that experience. We already have tabled, although not yet debated, the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill which contains a similar provision. The London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill contains entirely worthy measures, but it also contains a clause that would override listed building provisions.

I do not want to hold up the works in the Bill, but I insist that London Underground goes through the proper procedures in relation to gaining listed building consent and seeking to do works in conservation areas, rather than attempt to overturn them by means of a clause in a private Bill. I hope that we may be able to get a commitment from the promoters of the Bill on the point about listed building consent. Failing that, I hope that the Committee that may be established to consider the Bill will treat the clause in exactly the same way as another Committee treated clause 19 of the King's Cross Railways Bill.

It is an important constitutional point that private Bills should not override the provisions of primary legislation. We have set in place listed building protection to protect our heritage. It is not the place of the private Bill procedure lightly to overturn that protection. I fear that clause 31 of this Bill is doing precisely that.

7.12 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I am particularly glad to follow the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), because I, too, wish to refer to the great concern about clause 31 in the city of Westminster. I completely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the proposal and the principles that the Bill would set aside. I, too, have considered the plea from English Heritage that there should be greater consideration of those matters, and I sympathise with its point of view.

I particularly wish to address the House on behalf of Westminster city council and the residents of the city who, while strongly welcoming the proposal to develop the new underground facilities which my constituents and the people who live and work in the city will commonly enjoy, are concerned about setting aside the provisions of primary legislation to further the speedy passage of a private Bill.

As a general principle, Westminster city council opposes the powers that are sought by London Transport in the Bill to demolish listed buildings and unlisted buildings in conservation areas without recourse to normal planning procedures. The city council believes that consent to demolish a listed building or unlisted building in a conservation area should be granted only when a satisfactory design for the replacement building is approved and when proper guarantees about the construction of the replacement building are provided. That, of course, is normally a condition of consent in the first instance. As a planning authority, the city council, which has responsibility for granting such consents, requires both those conditions to be met to ensure not only that a replacement building is of a satisfactory design but that no unsightly vacant sites are left following demolition. Westminster city council opposes the provisions of clause 31 because no guarantees on those important issues have been provided.

I wish that those who promote this legislation would recognise that wider concerns within the community, and especially in the centre of London, must be addressed. Such concerns force the House to make a difficult decision. Are we to divide and oppose the Bill or can we expect a reasonable approach from the sponsor of the Bill so that the concerns of English Heritage, my council and the city of Westminster can be met? I hope that I shall receive some encouraging comments.

Westminster city council has noted the findings of the Opposed Private Bill Committee which recently reported on a similar issue on the Jubilee line Bill with respect to the demolition of Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street. The Opposed Private Bill Committee amended the Jubilee line Bill to require a resolution of the House to be passed, approving the design of the replacement of Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street before the existing building can be demolished. The city council welcomes the committee's recommendation that the design of replacement buildings is important, but is concerned that it still provides no certainty that the replacement building will be built.

My council continues to oppose the Bill on that basis. Residents of the city and the 500,000 or so people who work in the city would want these important underground facilities to be developed, but I wish that there was greater co-operation between those who promote private legislation and the statutory authorities that are responsible for planning matters. It is recognised that there is widespread public concern about our architectural heritage and the environment, and those matters must also be taken into account.

I very much hope that the House will listen and that those with responsibility for this matter will respond helpfully.

7.17 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) in expressing opposition to clause 31. I was just trying to do some quick checking to see whether the notice of motion relating to the attachment of environmental assessments to the private Bill proposals would cover the aspects of clause 31. I think that it probably would.

Clause 31 does not specify any of the buildings that might be affected, although I assume that plans have now been lodged. Perhaps the sponsor will indicate which historic buildings and listed buildings might be imperilled. Clearly, if the promoters of a private Bill were required to attach an environmental assessment, everyone would know precise details and promoters would be forced to look at that matter before they brought Bills to the House. That was one of the proposals made by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, of which I was a member. Several other proposals to change the Standing Orders have yet to be brought before the House.

It is important that the private Bill procedure should not be used to circumvent normal planning requirements. It is being used by several large corporations, local authorities, other statutory undertakers and transport undertakings deliberately to get round public inquiries and local authority planning procedures. That is wrong. We should not allow ourselves to be complices in creating a fast track round planning requirements for organisations such as London Regional Transport and London Underground.

Even if we accept the motion on environmental assessments, it will be too late for this Bill, because it has already started its passage through the House. The changes will apply only to Bills lodged from November.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) reminded me and the House that he was a member of the transport committee of the Greater London council. Undoubtedly he will be able to say, "Rejoice, rejoice" because tomorrow the Labour party launches its new proposals to establish a strategic body in London to be called the Greater London authority. I am glad to be GLA, but I do not know about the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Tonight we should have unity among colleagues on the two sides of the House. As Walworth road leaks like a sieve, I have read the document. However, I do not share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm.

Mr. Banks: Perhaps it depends on which version of the document the hon. Gentleman has read. I understand that several versions have been produced and that in the process the letters GLC have been removed. I am one of those who feel that we should stand proudly by the reputation, standing and works of the Greater London council. The hon. Member for Harrow, West reminded me that he was on the council. If he is nice to me, I might invite him to the first reception at county hall when the new Greater London authority is set up. He will have a place at the reception as an ex-member of the GLC.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West will be aware that when the GLC existed transport was under democratic control. Regrettably, that is no longer the case. One of the Labour party's undertakings in the document is that when we have a Labour Government after the next general election, transport well return to democratic control and be controlled by the Greater London authority based in county hall.

I do not intend to oppose the Bill tonight. However, I have expressed my reservations about clause 31. The works proposed for London Bridge, Tottenham Court Road and Holborn are desperately needed. The works at Tottenham Court Road are particularly necessary. The area is turning into one of the nastiest parts of London. The area around Centre Point, Oxford street, New Oxford street and Tottenham Court road looks filthy, tacky, nasty and run down. There are cowboys selling all sorts of things out of suitcases. As many tourists go to the area, we should feel ashamed that it reveals the picture of London that we want to remove. Again, the Labour party will address that matter in government and clean up the image of London.

It is clear that while the works continue there will be a great deal of disturbance to road surfaces in areas where the roads are already in an appalling condition. With the mess of deregulation, any number of bodies are allowed to dig up the roads. They include British Telecom, Mercury, Thames Water, British Gas and London Electricity. That is in addition to the development and building that is taking place in the area. The result is that London's roads are becoming ever more potholed. People find it dangerous to drive and walk around London's roads and pavements because of the appalling state of the surfaces. Damage to the surfaces is often caused by work carried out by the organisations that I mentioned.

I hope that, when the hon. Member for Harrow, West replies, he will give us some assurances that London Underground intends to take steps to avoid making our already appalling roads and pavements in London, especially in the Tottenham Court road and London bridge areas, even worse than they are now.

The hon. Member was right to say that the works were necessary to tackle overcrowding on the London underground. One of the reasons for the overcrowding is that the system has the least public support from central Government funding of all the urban networks in Europe. It is also the most expensive transport network in Europe. We have one of the most inefficient, perhaps the most overcrowded and dirty and the most expensive system in Europe. It is a wonderful combination of failings to come under all those headings.

I hope that when the hon. Member for Harrow, West replies about the state of the streets, he will also tell us—as he sits on the Government Benches—whether the Government intend to put more resources into London transport to give us the transportation system that a capital city such as London deserves. Unfortunately, it is unlikely to get it until we have a Labour Government in office and the Greater London authority sitting over in county hall.

7.25 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): There will be a fair degree of unanimity tonight on one point and less unanimity but some support on a second, and short lists of constituency issues will be raised on a third.

I agree with the hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) that it would be invidious to oppose a measure

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

which will create better safety on London underground. We all start from the premise that we want a safer underground system. We all remember the horrendous tragedy of the King's Cross fire and we are all aware of the clear recommendations of the Fennell report. We all want to ensure that the most congested underground stations become much more pleasant and safe environments, and that points of access and egress become safer.

There is no dispute about the principle of the Bill. We wish it good speed. One of the odd things about being a London Member at present is that on several occasions in the year we can be called to do our duty here, when various private Bills which affect our constituencies are introduced. This year, London Underground has promoted three Bills in the House which affect the London borough of Southwark, and especially Southwark and Bermondsey. First, the London Underground Bill was introduced to extend the Jubilee line. Then, London Underground realised that the Bill did not do all that it wanted, so we had the London Underground (No. 2) Bill, which again affected Southwark, and especially London Bridge station. Now we have the London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill, which also affects London Bridge.

If ever there was an illustration of the lack or inadequacy of strategic planning of transport and legislation for transport provision in the capital, it is the Bills introduced this year. I am fully aware that, behind the scenes, British Rail is preparing a proposal to carry out other works at London Bridge, which are likely to be the subject of a private Bill next year.

First, we had to contend with proposals for underground line works which will affect London Bridge station. Now we are debating proposals for works on the Northern line, which already exists at London Bridge station, and next year we shall debate proposals on the railway line. By any definition, that is not a logical way to proceed. The sooner we return to strategic planning of public transport in the capital city the better. That means that underground, bus, railway, river bus, road and eventually tram provision must be co-ordinated.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is bursting to make an obvious point.

Mr. Banks: It may be obvious, but I should like it to be put on the record that that is precisely what the new Greater London authority will do. We shall expect strong support from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman was almost bound to anticipate my next point. The Liberal party, newly named the Liberal Democrats—

Mr. Snape: Among other things.

Mr. Hughes: No, we have only ever had two names, thank God, in spite of many attempts to give us other names in between. The Liberal party, now called the Liberal Democrats, supports a Greater London authority. We have always said so. One of the jobs for such an authority would be to plan transport strategically. There has never been any secret about that.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) knows that if some of the predictions for the general election are right and there is no overall control in the country, as there is now no overall political control in London, his party and my party, which have similar views on many issues of co-ordinated planning, hope to implement similar policies. There is no secret about that. Together, we should have the votes in the House to bring it about. We would rescue county hall from being taken over by the private sector, or even buy it back if it had already been taken over.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman goes even further than we do.

Mr. Hughes: That is right, We are willing to put up taxes, too, which I heard the shadow Chief Secretary say yesterday in "On the Record" that the Labour party was not willing to do. Even if the Labour party goes less far than we do on the other matters, we bring it with us in relation to a co-ordinated London planning authority.

I want to ask a couple of questions which I hope that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) will be able to answer if he is allowed to speak at the end of the debate. I want to ask him about the conjunction of four measures—three actual and one anticipated—that will affect London Bridge station. It seems to some of my constituents that the planning for the London Bridge part of this Bill, which is concerned with the Northern line, is now effectively under the control of the Jubilee line team —planning for London Bridge has been transferred. I do not object to that so long as we can find out who is really in charge.

Soon we shall debate again the Jubilee line and its effect on London bridge, so it is logical that the same people should plan the improvements under the Bill and those for the Jubilee line. It would also help my constituents—private residents and businesses—to know with whom they are dealing, and it would help to co-ordinate London underground developments if one body only were involved. Are the same people, the Jubilee line team, dealing with the developments at London Bridge station?

Secondly, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I share the strong reservations of the hon. Members for Newham, North-West, for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Westminster, North about clause 31. There is no justification for getting rid of planning controls over the civic heritage of London. This objection was also made by the Committee that looked into the King's Cross development. Planning controls are built into the system to protect our buildings and they ought to do so, especially when a major development such as the building of an underground station is to take place around them.

Will the hon. Member for Harrow, West tell the promoters that, if they persist with clause 31, they will run into substantial difficulty? I hope that they will not persist.

When the Committee on the London Underground Bill reported, it produced what the hon. Member for Westminster, North described as a compromise on Bridge street and the Jubilee line. It did not insist that the local authority should control planning permission, but it did insist that certain aspects were under the control of Parliament, because parliamentary buildings were affected. That argument does not apply anywhere else, so the promoters cannot expect to reach a similar compromise anywhere else. I hope that the Bill will be changed.

My two last questions relate to specific sites. The sponsor and the Minister may be aware that one of my

constituents petitioned the House of Lords, making the sensible and logical suggestion that the entrance to the underground station on the east side of Borough high street, rather than being one property south, down from St. Thomas's street, which would destroy the new Guy's restaurant, should be one property further up.

Mr. Snape: That sounds like a free meal.

Mr. Hughes: Even if there may be a free meal in the future, I have not had one there so far. Perhaps, as in the American legal system, one has to win the case before one gets the free meal. I shall have to try harder. Certainly I should be happy to have a free meal—*[Interruption.]* We have to make sure that the *Official Report* records our words accurately, so I must explain that once the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) had implied that there was no such thing as a free meal, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said that, coming from him, that was a surprising comment. That was an unfair allegation.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): But typical.

Mr. Hughes: Indeed, it was typical.

The idea of moving the station entrance is logical, quite apart from the benefit to myself and other Members who might get together and vote to preserve the restaurant. The building on the corner is owned by Barclays bank, which could afford relocation more easily than could Mr. Conti for his restaurant. If the station entrance were on the street corner because of accessibility and visibility to the public, that would be a more logical site. It is more logical to put underground station entrances on the corner of two main roads rather than just round the corner, so that they cannot be seen from both directions.

The site has become controversial because it is the local underground entrance for Guy's hospital. Perhaps it is a question of opting in or out. *[Interruption.]* I do not bank at Barclays, so my account is not at risk.

My other argument is about the site, at Nos. 31 to 37, on the other side of Borough high street. Hon. Members will be aware that there is sometimes a suspicion that promoters of Bills get carried away with the idea that, if they have the powers, they can take over a much bigger site than they need. That allows them to hold on to the property and thus derive a financial benefit. Compensation is often inadequate for existing owners. There is no dispute about that in the House. Compensation has, for instance, been hotly contested in the case of the Channel tunnel.

British Rail or London Underground, for example, acquires a site, digs its holes and makes an underground station entrance. Thereafter it has possession of the site and can build office blocks or retail sites, or sell. I do not say that the entire site is not needed in this case, but two questions arise in relation to it.

First, there is some residential property on the site now, and I understand that an undertaking was originally given to include some in the rebuild. But now, during the negotiations, no such undertaking is forthcoming. We need to retain every residential unit we have in an area such as London Bridge. Every development there risks our losing residential property in favour of commercial property.

It is difficult for residents to find other accommodation, and if they did so they would have to pay more, as they have either a mortgage on a property acquired at a low cost before values rose, or a protected rent such as they would not find if they had to move somewhere else. In the case that I have in mind, a young couple bought the property some years ago. It is their home; they happen to live above commercial property. There is a strong general case for trying to preserve the mix. We should not remove residential property from our inner cities and replace it with office blocks. If nobody lives there, there is nobody around in the evening, and the environment is far less humane.

Why is there no clear commitment to keeping this residential property? We want a much more positive approach to the negotiations, so that, if the site has to be lost to the development, we secure a decent property at the end of the exercise.

I have asked several general and some specific questions. We are precluded from asking such questions in Committee, because we may not be on it. I hope that the message is getting through loud and clear. This may be the last time that London Underground or British Rail can, without environmental impact assessment, pursue legislation in this way. They should not assume that, because this is their last chance, there will not be a hard fight if they ignore what hon. Members seek.

7.40 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It may be helpful to restate the Government's view of the Bill. The Government have considered its contents and have no objection in principle to the powers being sought by London Underground Ltd. The Bill will enable major works to be undertaken at London Bridge, Holborn and Tottenham Court Road underground stations, to relieve congestion and improve conditions for passengers. The works at London Bridge are essentially for the Jubilee line extension, so that more passengers can be carried to that station. The works at Tottenham Court Road station will have to be carried out before the planned east-west crossrail station can be opened.

I hope that the House will support the proposals for better safety access at these stations. There are some petitions against the Bill, and the petitioners, if they pursue the matter, will have the opportunity to present their objections to a Select Committee. I am sure that the members of the Select Committee will have a much better opportunity than we have had in this debate to examine the issues in detail. They will have the added advantage of hearing expert evidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) and the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) expressed concern about clause 31. I appreciate the firm views on this matter. As the House knows, the clause was substantially amended in the other place and now specifies only those buildings that will be affected by the works, showing whether they will be demolished or altered. The Government accept the amended clause and recognise that this is a sensitive issue.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment agree that there must be a compelling reason for making an exception to the normal statutory arrangements for protecting listed buildings.

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

They are agreed on that in view of the condemnation of similar provisions by a Select Committee which examined the Bill dealing with King's Cross.

Restricted and strategically important projects are being promoted in pursuance of the Government's policy objectives. Those could be at risk if the promoters were not able to secure in one procedure all the necessary consents for their schemes. That has some force as part of the argument that, if Parliament saw fit to authorise such schemes, it would be unreasonable for the promoters to be required additionally to apply for listed building consent to demolish or alter the necessary buildings.

In accepting that compromise solution, the Government are concerned to safeguard the position of English Heritage as an expert adviser on conservancy issues. It is able to contribute to the consideration of the works by the Select Committee, and that will assist the Select Committee to make informed decisions about the listed building aspects of particular projects. That means that English Heritage should be allowed to appear before the Select Committee on matters within its competence.

The Bill's clauses should contain details of the buildings that will be affected and in what way. Blanket clauses disapplying the listed building controls would not be acceptable. The environmental impact assessment for a project, which we intend to make compulsory for such Bills, would contain an account of the effect on the built heritage.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister should bear two matters in mind. First, there is a precedent in the House for English Heritage being denied locus standi in presenting a petition about precisely such matters in relation to a private Bill. There is no absolute guarantee that that fate would not befall English Heritage again. Secondly, although the Minister says that the removal of listed building protection would apply only in a very specific way, it still removes the protection of primary legislation. What is the Government's position on the rightness or wrongness of an inadequate private Bill procedure overturning protection that is written into basic legislation and reiterated in several Acts of Parliament?

Mr. McCloughlin: I hope that I have given the hon. Gentleman some reassurance. My understanding is that English Heritage should be allowed to appear before the Select Committee. I am aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman mentions, in which English Heritage was refused a locus. I hope that what has been agreed will go some way to putting that right.

The promoters would be obliged to consult English Heritage throughout the passage of the Bill. That would also be helpful to the promoters. It is not helpful for people to be in conflict, and a general attempt to reach agreement makes the passage of a Bill much easier.

Mr. Tony Banks: Have the Bill's promoters given a clear undertaking that they will accept evidence from English Heritage? If they object to such evidence, it will become a matter for the Standing Orders Committee. Under Standing Orders, if there is no direct locus—and there is not under the current private Bill procedure—the Standing Orders Committee would be bound to uphold the promoters' decision. Have the promoters given the Minister a clear undertaking that they will accept a petition or evidence from English Heritage?

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that that is the case. As I said earlier, there should not be a problem about that.

The Government are against Bills whose promoters seek a blanket disapplication of listed building control, or who do not consult English Heritage on these matters. We accept that the number of cases would be few and far between but, given the arrangements that I have outlined, the Secretaries of State would be prepared to support clauses which disapplied the controls in respect of specific buildings for particular works.

We accept the amended clause. The works at London Bridge and Tottenham Court Road stations are essential for the construction of the proposed underground line for London—notably the Jubilee line extension and the east-west crossrail route. I note that the Select Committee will examine the Bill relating to the Jubilee line. In allowing the Bill to proceed, agreement has been reached on a compromise clause, albeit with certain conditions in respect of the proposed parliamentary buildings. In these cases, the compromise clause maintains a proper regard for legislative controls designed to protect the national heritage while avoiding any duplication of effort and the potential risk of Parliament's wishes being overridden by a planning authority.

I hope that the House will agree to give the Bill a Second Reading. Those hon. Members who spoke in the debate have welcomed the Bill. Congestion on our transport system is an important matter of public interest. If we delay the Bill's progress, we shall hold up, perhaps for some time, measures that are urgently needed to relieve the congestion on London underground.

7.48 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The House has given an unqualified welcome to most of the Bill's clauses, especially those which relate to the work that is necessary to relieve congestion and improve safety at London Bridge, Tottenham Court Road and Holborn stations. All those who have used any or all of those stations know how essential these works are, and the Bill shows the importance of that work to the future operation of London Underground Ltd.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who is in charge of the Bill on behalf of the promoters, spoke about escalators at those three stations and in other parts of the underground system. Those of us who have used the London underground for a number of years are aware of the recent severe deterioration in that organisation. We are all apt to look back on our younger days as a halcyon period in which the trains ran on time and the sun shone every day, but having used the London underground system regularly for about 30 years, I know that I have never seen it in the state that it is in today. Regular and continuous work on escalators is, in my view and I suspect that of the vast majority of passengers, long overdue.

Like other hon. Members, I regularly use the underground between the terminal station at which I arrive in London and the House. For months, I have wandered around the bowels of Euston undergound station trying to get to the Victoria line to make my way to the House. The only work that I have seen on the

escalators at Euston has been the replacement, every six months or so, of the notices telling passengers that the escalators are temporarily out of order. There appears to be no sense of urgency about doing the work. As with other public sector industries since the Government's axe fell upon them, the work that needs to be done on the London underground can be done only if a budget exists. All too often, the budget does not exist, so the work does not get done.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Harrow, West, as a member of the Greater London council between 1980 and 1986, did not refer to these matters. Like other hon. Members, I served on the Committee considering the Bill abolishing the GLC, thereby removing from it responsibility for running the London underground. The hon. Gentleman was a member of the GLC at that time, even if I cannot honour him with the description of "distinguished member". I am sure that he was, but I do not know.

Mr. Tony Banks: No, he was not.

Mr. Snape: I accept my hon. Friend's view, as he knows the hon. Gentleman better than I do.

While the Bill was going through the House, the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), continually assured us that the London underground would be far more efficient when it was freed of the ideological constraints of the GLC. In Committee, one got the distinct impression that the right hon Gentleman hated members of the Greater London council even more than he hated the Germans. I am afraid that that hatred appeared to embrace all parties represented on that authority, although I am not sure how well the right hon. Gentleman knew the hon. Member for Harrow, West.

Over and over again, we were told that freedom from the political control of the elected strategic body would benefit the passengers. It is apparent from this Bill and from the words of Conservative Members that that has not been the case. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) gave us his objections to clause 31. He has made a similar point during the passage of other Bills through the House and it is no less relevant for that. He was joined in his strictures against clause 31 by the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) who, as far as I am aware, was not a member of the GLC. However, according to "Dod's Parliamentary Companion", he is chairman of a body called the Conservative Greater London area Members committee. That sounds an influential body, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would use his chairmanship to point out to the newly freed managers of London Underground Ltd. how objectionable clause 31 is not only to him but to his democratically elected and Conservative-controlled authority.

Given the well-known antipathy of the hon. Member for Westminster, North to the GLC and all its works, I am surprised that he is criticising a body to which he had given his whole-hearted support in the past. I should tell him and the hon. Member for Harrow, West that, if one creates a body like London Underground Ltd. and tells it that its only remit is to work within the financial constraints laid down by the Department of Transport, it will not be too keen on provisions such as those in the Bill, outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and Conservative Members, to preserve listed buildings and other important sites. If it has no remit to concern itself with such matters—unlike an elected strategic body—it is not surprising that it has drafted clause 31 in that way. However, it is surprising that Conservative Members have said that they are disturbed by the inclusion of that clause.

Conservative Members have, at least implicitly, criticised the management of London Underground Ltd. because of the necessity both for the Bill and the works included therein. I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is not with us tonight. I noticed in the *London Evening Standard*—surely one of the most appalling evening newspapers in the western world—some sage advice from the hon. Gentleman, a man known for understatement and delicacy of thought and mind, who represents the intellectual wing of the Conservative party. He had some harsh words to say about the management of London Underground Ltd. "Sack the lot" was the headline that proceeded his customary thoughtful words. If he feels like that about the management, it is understandable that there should be some criticism from others in the House. It is understandable, too, that two mild-mannered men like the hon. Members for Harrow, West and for Westminster, North should express those views.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), expressed support, to a greater and lesser degree—I am not saying which is greater and which is lesser—for an elected Greater London authority, the GLA. My hon. Friend reminded us of the need for such an authority to co-ordinate not only the matters dealt with in the Bill but transport, street works and road planning within Greater London. Labour Members endorse that, and I suspect that if they were allowed to do so, one or two Conservative Members would like to do the same.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, in between plugs for a restaurant and Barclays bank, was forward in telling us how advanced are his party's views on the need for the election of a strategic body and how it would put up taxes—in the unlikely event that it were ever in a position to do so—to pay for this and other desirable objectives. I am not sure whether it would be right and proper for me to draw those remarks to the attention of the leader of the Liberal Democrats, but no doubt whatever the demand, whether for lower or higher taxes, for a strategic authority or not, for greater or lesser planning in transport, both public and private, in Greater London, a member of the Liberal Democrats can be found either to support or reject it.

Mr. McLoughlin: While the hon. Gentleman is drawing the attention of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to spending plans, will he tell us whether his commitment to various transport policies in London is an overriding commitment, a first commitment, an immediate commitment, a top priority or a commitment for a Labour Government many years away?

Mr. Snape: I am always fascinated by the interest of the Conservative party in pouring scorn and abuse on any Opposition Member who dares to suggest that our public

[Mr. Snape]

services—our transport system, our national health service and all other services where the rest of Europe has long since left us behind——

Mr. McLoughlin: Answer the question.

Mr. Snape: If the Minister will contain himself for a moment or two, I shall do just that.

Why should scorn be poured on any proposal to improve the services provided by London Underground Ltd., for example, so that they match similar services that are provided elsewhere in Europe? If he reads the document that is entitled "Moving Britain into the 90s" —if he wishes, I shall send him a copy free of charge—he will learn how the Labour party proposes to make improvements and how a Labour Government would pay for them. I shall be pleased if the Minister shows the document to the hon. Member for Westminster, North after he has read it. The hon. Member for Westminster, North can take it to a meeting of the Conservative Greater London area Members committee. It appears that it does not have a great deal to do in terms of clause 31 and other provisions. When the Minister has read my party's document and digested it, I know that he will agree with me and other Opposition Members that the works outlined in the Bill and the document are essential and agree with us on how sensible are the Labour party's proposals to pay for them.

8 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I shall start by talking about clause 31. I appreciate what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said, but I do not trust promoters of Bills. I want to see an undertaking written into the Bill that will guarantee a locus for English Heritage. I think that that is the view of everyone who has spoken this evening and that it will be endorsed. I congratulate my hon. Friend on welcoming a compromise, but I do not believe that the compromise goes as far as it should in the interests of English Heritage.

I shall now make the one political remark that I intend to introduce into the debate. For seven years, I had the pleasure of being chairman of the Greater London Council Conservative Members Committee. For seven years, I had the privilege also of being vice-chairman of the Conservative party for London. During that time, we won more borough council elections and more parliamentary seats than hitherto, and we also won the Greater London council. We did so because we understood what the people of London wanted. We told them that a vote for the Liberals was a vote for a Lib-Lab pact. I am glad that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has repeated this evening the support that he and his party will give to the Labour party. There is a new Lib-Lab pact afoot, but, as the Liberal Democrats will not have the chance of supporting the Labour party except in opposition, I do not mind.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As we do not know what will happen after the next general election I invite the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg)——

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) be here?

Mr. Hughes: I shall be here. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate has said that he will not be.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate knows that, at present, London is a capital city without the overall control of one council. All the authorities post-GLC are participants in some form of shared decision making. He knows also that, in those circumstances, there is no Lib-Lab or Lib-Con pact. Decisions are taken differently according to the authority and the subject on which a decision is to be taken.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I believe that London was better run when there was a Conservative-controlled London Boroughs Association and a Conservative GLC, but I make that the end of the politics.

I want to talk about the Bill, and especially about provisions that have been omitted. I hope that, by the time I have finished, which I hope will not be too short a time, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, who speaks for the promoter, will be able to give me an understanding. If he is able to do so, I shall not try to talk out the Bill this evening. If I am not given an undertaking, I ask my hon. Friend to understand that there are at least two more stages in the Bill's consideration and that there are four more London Transport Bills, all of which I shall block at every stage. I wish to make my intentions clear.

From the time that I first entered the House, I have put my constituency interests ahead of everything else. I believe that my constituents are being given a raw deal by an insensitive and incompetent management of London Transport. In that context I refer to the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (Extension to London, &c.) Act 1893.

Sir John Wheeler: I know it well.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend will appreciate that it contains only 139 pages. I do not propose on this occasion—I do not commit myself for future occasions —to read the 139 pages. I want, however, to make some references to the Act.

First, I shall explain to the House why I am blocking the Bill. In west Hampstead, by Broadhurst gardens, there is a series of railway lines. There is the British Rail line to Marylebone, the Jubilee line and the Metropolitan line, which are spanned by a footbridge. The bridge was built well over 100 years ago, and it has an interesting history. When I was a small child, I was taken by my uncle to the bridge to watch railway engines. I was a steam railway buff, and I still am. I am a non-executive director of the Bluebell line and I still like steam trains.

The footbridge was known as Granny Dripping's steps, a name that intrigues everybody. It seems that it received the name because an elderly lady was alleged to have sat on the steps eating bread and dripping. I never saw her, but the bridge retained its name.

Towards the end of last year, the bridge, which London Transport prosaically calls bridge No. 26, was closed. The chairman of London Transport replied to the letter in which I inquired when the footbridge would be brought back into operation. He wrote:

"The footbridge is jointly owned by London Underground and British Rail, with the maintenance responsibility vested in London Underground."

Perhaps I should put British Rail on notice. As the bridge spans its lines, I shall be blocking its legislation so that it puts pressure upon London Transport to carry out its

responsibilities for the reason that the "maintenance responsibility" for the bridge is "vested in London Underground." The letter continues:

"The footbridge is 110 years old and has been the subject of heavy repairs over the years. Recently, several of the stair treads on the BR side of the bridge collapsed and consequently the bridge was closed for safety reasons.

My civil engineers have again inspected the bridge. It is seriously corroded and even if the steps were repaired, it would not be safe for public use. We now appear to have two options; rebuilding a little used facility"—

how the chairman knows that I do not know, because no count has been taken. Those of my constituents who use the bridge are not too few and the chairman of London Transport has not been briefed about a major development that is in progress in the area. I shall come back to that matter in half an hour or so.

As I said, the chairman wrote:

"We now appear to have two options: rebuilding a little used facility at a cost of perhaps £400,000 . . . or to seek parliamentary powers to close the footpaths and demolish the bridge."

I remind the House that the bridge has already been closed by London Transport in breach of parliamentary powers. The letter continues:

"You will recall"—

that is a reference to myself—

"that we pursued the latter course about eight years ago."

I blocked legislation on that occasion and, lo and behold, the bridge was reopened.

The chairman adds:

"I am advised"—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Member is an experienced parliamentarian, and I have never known him abuse the procedures of the House. He has always adhered strictly to the terms of the business before the House, but I fear that tonight he is straying far. I understand that he wants to block the Bill. I am sure that he knows, however, that he must find reasons for doing so that come within the proposed legislation. I ask him to read the Bill carefully and to relate his comments more closely to the business that is before us this evening.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this is a Second Reading debate. I am speaking of things that should be in the Bill—I would not be able to do so on Third Reading—and I am contending that, within the Bill, there should be a reference to the footbridge where there are powers to make works. I shall not stray beyond that.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: It may be helpful if I seek to reassure my hon. Friend. As he will know, it is not possible for anyone other than the chairman of London Transport to give the assurance that my hon. Friend seeks. I consulted London Transport officials both before this debate and while my hon. Friend has been making his speech. The chairman's letter from which my hon. Friend quoted dated 24 April states:

"My statement that we would consider the position"—

that is, in respect of the bridge—

"was not just a platitude."

I am asked to tell my hon. Friend that repairs to the bridge have certainly not been ruled out, but must be properly considered. I know that a meeting has been arranged between my hon. Friend and the chairman of London Transport, at which I hope progress will be made. As my hon. Friend said, there will be other opportunities for him to pursue the matter—and to block the Bill, if he wants. I am not sure that I can go further this evening.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My problem is that the chairman stated in a subsequent letter that he had been advised that "it is not a practical option to repeat the sort of repair work eventually done at that time."

Therefore, I am not at all certain as to the true position.

I want to be clear that I am in order in referring to the issue that I have, and in seeking a specific provision in the Bill to cover it, because I do not want to abuse the procedures of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Currently, the hon. Member is in order.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Bill makes reference to "connected purposes"—and they include possession of land, incorporation of land provisions, and so on. Clause 46 of the 1893 Act to which I referred earlier refers to the protection of the vestry of St. John, Hampstead. It states:

"Whenever the Company"—

that is, the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire railway—

"shall break up or disturb any part of the soil or surface of any road or footway in the said parish for any of the purposes of this Act, the Company shall within four months after any such road or footway shall have been broken up as aforesaid complete and finish the works of the Company, and shall make good and restore every such road or footway to the satisfaction of the surveyor to the vestry".

I could continue to quote from that legislation and remain in order, but instead I will make the point that the Act does not say anywhere that a right of way is to be extinguished—but that is clearly the intention which has been clearly expressed in the letter to me from London Underground. That is not the way that it ought to proceed.

In continuing, I shall seek to remain strictly within the rules of the House in respect of private legislation and Second Reading debates. A letter from the Combined Residents Association of West Hampstead states:

"I am writing to offer you my congratulations for the stand you have taken over the closure by London Underground of the West Hampstead footbridge and your tactics in blocking their Bills until they agree to make the necessary repairs or proffer some reasonable proposal."

I welcomed the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, and I look forward to my meeting with the chairman of London Transport. However, I am confused by the contents of his second letter, which appears to mark a change of position since his original communication.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: It is difficult to make a judgment without seeing the letter from which my hon. Friend quoted, but when the chairman of London Transport commented that it would be impracticable to repeat the previous repairs exercise, perhaps he was referring to work to bring the bridge back into service for five to eight years—and that, were London Transport to undertake any work, it would be more permanent. Perhaps my hon. Friend will find that interpretation encouraging.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but I cannot yet say whether I am encouraged by it. Had London Underground carried out normal annual maintenance, the situation would not have arisen.

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

I refer again to the letter from the combined residents association:

"First, the cost figure of £400,000 sounds excessive. It brings to mind the inflated cost estimate for the repair of the Ribble Valley viaduct on the Settle-Carlisle railway line by British Rail when they were proposing its closure. If my memory is correct, once the line was reprieved the figure became much lower! Surely there must be a reputable private sector contractor in need of work. . .who could do the work for less."

On 27 April, Mr. E. Dixon, chairman of the Jubilee and Bakerloo users group committee, wrote to the chairman of London Underground as follows:

"Some of our users in west and south Hampstead are very concerned about the closure of this bridge. I know myself that its condition has been suspect for a considerable number of years—having on occasion to use it to travel between Canfield Gardens and Crediton Hill, or on going from Broadhurst Gardens across to the relevant part of Finchley Road. Usage of the bridge may be low, but it will be appreciated that the Charterhall scheme at Finchley Road will probably have a significant effect in this regard.

Now the bridge is a right of way. As such it is part of the trade-off under which we are unable to travel on the Jubilee line (or alternatively the Metropolitan or BR Marylebone lines). Surface railway lines in urban communities are often highly antisocial in their severance effects (as I and my neighbours know to our own heavy cost in time in Camden's nearby Kilburn ward, when the railway was 'there first'. However, its privileged position is accepted, notwithstanding the local detriment, and (though this does not apply at all to the Marylebone line and only most marginally to the Metropolitan line), there is at least some trade-off in usage of the line by the local community, and in the associated spin off benefits. However, in local terms the balance is seriously adverse; yet the operator is not compelled to address this by providing bridges where none existed and there are no rights of way.

By precisely the same token, the privilege of the right of way falls to be accepted by you as the operator and by us as the benefiting users of the railway line. This is not a matter in which the luxury of 'priorities' can be indulged. It is basic to the operators' right to operate over the land in question and to ours as service users to travel there. . .and we call upon London Underground and British Rail to meet the relevant obligations."

I acknowledge of course the importance of a Bill that includes the words "safety measures" in its title. However, that does not mean that we should give the Bill a fair wind without protecting the interests of our constituents or—as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said—those of English Heritage. Otherwise, the inclusion of the words "safety measures" in any Bill could allow it to pass happily through the House.

What opportunities does the Bill provide for improved safety measures and for satisfying the demands of my Hampstead constituents? The closure of the bridge in question adds at least 10 to 12 minutes to the journeys of pedestrians, who are compelled to walk the entire length of Broadhurst gardens, into Finchley road and on to Finchley road or Frogmore stations, or to reach the public library in Arkwright road.

London Transport ought not to be allowed this Bill without a clause which would guarantee the perpetuation of the right of way which stems back more than 100 years, providing a footbridge over the railway lines that I mentioned.

It is incumbent upon a public authority that promotes legislation not to ride roughshod over a particular interest affecting local people in an area. I am wondering whether London Transport hoped that once the bridge was closed the problem would quietly go away and no one would notice. However, that is unlikely to happen in constituencies like Hampstead, where constituents are prone to letter writing and are active in bringing matters to the notice of their Member of Parliament. On this occasion I had already written to the chairman of London Transport because I realised the problem early on.

If someone gives an undertaking in an Act of Parliament and later seeks—it does not matter whether it is 50, 80 or 100 years later—to abolish it, it leads one to wonder whether any undertakings given in this Bill, or in any other promoted by a public authority, such as a local council or the railway authority, are worth the paper they are printed on. That is my worry. It is easy to shrug off a responsibility, but that is not what Acts of Parliament are for, and I do not believe that the House welcomes that concept. However, if we pass this Bill that is the risk that we are running.

Footbridge No. 26, Granny Dripping's steps, had been closed and was due to be extinguished. Why is there no reference to its demolition in the section of the Bill on various works to be carried out, because that must be a safety measure? Why is there no reference to abolition of the right of way? At least that would give the House the chance to say whether that should happen. Or, as an alternative, why is it not stated that powers will be taken in this Bill to repair or renew the bridge?

I know the chairman of London Transport, who is a highly honourable and reputable man, but I have to face the facts as they are presented to me at this stage. I emphasise the word "facts". They do not give me confidence that I can return to my constituents and tell them that Granny Dripping's steps are saved and will be replaced, and that they will be able to walk across them on their lawful business, either to go to West Hampstead north London link station, or to the library or the development which is under way to provide a vast new supermarket for the benefit of local people.

I hope that I am an eminently reasonable man, and I am tempted not to continue for too long tonight, in view of what my hon. Friend for Harrow, West has said. I appreciate that those who are guiding him tonight—pleasant though they may be—do not have the authority. Because I am seeing the chairman and the deputy chairman of London Regional Transport later this week, I am inclined to adopt a reasonable attitude.

I have many other matters to talk about. As you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are several schedules and 33 clauses in the Bill, and as you rightly said, keeping strictly in order, if I spoke for five minutes on each —because my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West did not explain much of what was in the Bill—I could take 33 times five minutes. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend would be able to find the 100 Members necessary to bring the debate to a close this evening. However, I shall talk about one or two items, not all 33.

Clause 25 makes certain provisions for the protection of the British Railways board. I remind the House that, in the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway (Extension to London, &c.) Act, 1893, clause 46 was for the protection of the vestry of St. John, Hampstead. As I said earlier, that protection is about to disappear by a back door method. How safe is the protection outlined in clause 25? The clause talks about "designated property" and "plans" which include

"drawings and particulars and 'approved plans'".

All that sort of information appears in the 1893 Act, which talks about maintaining

"to the satisfaction of the surveyor of the vestry all . . . footways, bridges works and conveniences as shall be necessary for the safe and commodious ingress and egress to and from the houses on the line of the works of the Company in the said parish and for the preservation and continuance of an uninterrupted supply of gas and water to the said houses".

I wonder whether the chairman of British Rail is as happy today with the protection that has been given to his board as he was when the Bill was drafted. Further on, the Bill talks about the railways board giving

"to the engineer not less than 28 days' notice of their intention to commence the construction of any of the specified works".

It also states:

"The specified works shall when commenced be carried out . . . with all reasonable dispatch . . . and . . . as little interference as may be with the conduct of traffic on any railway of the railway board and the use by passengers of designated property".

I believe that the 1893 Act could give powers to the vestry of St. John, Hampstead, which became the metropolitan borough of Hampstead in 1899, and the London borough of Camden in 1965. Therefore, the surveyor of the London borough of Camden, who is by default the surveyor for the vestry, could demand that certain works be carried out,

"and the Company shall also defray the expense incurred by the vestry".

It would be interesting to know whether, if the London borough of Camden decided to carry out work to repair the bridge, London Underground would decide that it could do it better and that it would rather do so than let the descendant of the surveyor of the vestry of St. John, Hampstead carry out the work. That is one reason why I am a little uneasy.

Clause 24 deals with the incorporation of protective provisions. It protects gas, water and electricity undertakers. I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West to its reference to section 42 of the London Transport Act 1963, which applies to the protection of the gas, water and electricity undertakers, and section 13 of the London Transport Act 1976, which applies to the protection of the sewers of Thames water authority. Does that refer only to sewers and foul-weather sewers or to the pipes that provide fresh drinking water? There is a difference between the water mentioned in the 1963 Act and the sewers in the 1976 Act, but the Bill is not clear.

Clause 24 becomes less clear further on, because subsection (2) refers not to Thames water authority but to Thames Water Utilities Ltd. Is that a reference to foul sewers and fresh water?

It would be wiser and kinder if I began—only began—to draw my remarks to a conclusion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West tells me that I might have read more into the words of the chairman of London Transport than I have so far. That would allow other hon. Members to take part in the debate, but I cannot promise that I shall be as generous on later stages of the Bill.

As I should not wish to fall foul of a future ruling from the Chair—I have carefully kept my comments in order tonight—I shall table probably a dozen amendments, which might provide me with the time to make London Transport realise, if it does not realise now, that I am serious about acting in the interests of my constituents.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West will be able to answer the point that I made about water, but I give notice that, if necessary, I shall return to the subject, much invigorated, with a variety of amendments that I shall draft carefully with those who understand how they should be drafted so that I cannot be told by the Minister or the promoter that they are out of order. I await the next instalment.

8.33 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: With the leave of the House, I shall try to answer some of the points that have been made by hon. Members and work myself up to a crescendo to answer some of the points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg).

In fact, I shall start with my hon. Friend, who asked whether the escalators would be standard or special escalators. Special escalators will be installed, because most escalators cannot take the load of several tonnes of passengers at a time for 24 hours a day in a dusty environment while remaining in place as a fixed staircase to facilitate maintenance and emergency procedures. Although they will be ordered from several suppliers, they will all be built to a standard London Regional Transport heavy-duty specification. The implication is that spares will be interchangeable.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: That is helpful, but I cannot understand—perhaps my hon. Friend will arrange for someone to write to me about this—why escalators cannot be a standard length. Escalators should be a standard length, except for the last part, which might have to be a different length. One of the reasons for the appalling delays in repairing escalators is that the length of each one is different. I know that they will be the same specification, but they are all different sizes. Can that be avoided in future?

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I remember such debates from my experience on Greater London council. His remarks have been noted and I shall ensure that the promoters write to him.

The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who explained that he would not be able to remain for all the debate, asked about clause 31, which was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The clause has been substantially modified since the Bill was deposited in the light of the comments of the Opposed Private Bill Committee that considered the King's Cross Bill. It has been limited to specified buildings and to only the purposes needed for the Bill's objectives. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment supported that modification, which was made on Third Reading in the other place, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport instructed the chairman of London Regional Transport to give an undertaking to consult local authorities and English Heritage. The chairman of LRT has agreed to do so.

The Bill proposes to delist only one listed building—it is important to put that in perspective—that previously had consent for partial demolition. All other demolitions and alterations are minor—new entrances and protection against settlement—and in each case consent will be sought from the planning authority for all changes and alterations.

Mr. Simon Hughes What is the listed building that is proposed for demolition?

Mr. Hughes: I shall ask the promoters to write to the hon. Gentleman about it; I should quite like to know as well.

Clause 31 seeks to secure all necessary consents through Parliament so that Parliament's will cannot be thwarted by subsequent decisions and to avoid delay. I can give an assurance that the three local authorities concerned have been consulted and, so far, have not opposed the proposed works.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend will recall that I specifically requested that a locus for English Heritage should be included in the Bill. Is he prepared to say that that will happen?

Mr. Hughes: I hope that the assurances I have given are sufficient for my hon. Friend. I do not know enough parliamentary draftsmanship to know whether such an inclusion is possible, but I shall ask the promoters to write to my hon. Friend to ensure that that point is explored. However, the assurances that I have given on what will happen are firm ones. London Regional Transport wants to maintain a constructive attitude towards English Heritage and it will seek to consult it at all relevant stages.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) spoke about the planning powers in the Bill and the concerns of the city of Westminister, which have principally arisen because clause 31 supplants that city's responsibilities. I have been instructed that the city of Westminister does not object to the works proposed at Tottenham Court Road. The clause simply avoids any risk of overriding Parliament. I repeat my earlier assurance that it is LRT's intention to consult on every stage of the process.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is unable to be present because of another appointment, spoke about the environmental impact of the work and road surfaces. Environmental impact studies have been carried out for all the proposed works and were exhibited to the Committee in the other place. The work requested by the hon. Gentleman has already been done. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the problems caused by digging up the roads, the disruption caused and the state of the road surfaces. An undertaking has been given to each of the highway authorities concerned that the work on the highways and footpaths will be carried out in such a way as to leave them in an acceptable condition.

All the work will be carried out subject to a code of construction practice agreed with the local authorities. That code will cover working practices, noise, dust emissions and lorry movements. The work on London Bridge will take three years, at Holborn, three years and at Tottenham Court Road, four years. I appreciate that those works will cause disruption, but as much as possible has been done to seek co-operation with the local authorities under the code of construction.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey spoke about the co-ordination of work at London Bridge. I listened with great interest to what he said about what has happened and what might happen. I share his sympathy for his constituents who live near London Bridge—an area which is being disrupted constantly.

The scheme at London Bridge will be constructed in conjunction with the Jubilee line works, using the same working site. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is right to assume that the project will be under the control of the Jubilee line project team. The hon. Gentleman made two specific points about the location of two of the entrances to the station. It seems that, when it comes to the ticket hall at Borough high street, the hon. Gentleman wants a meal in the restaurant rather than a bank account at Barclays.

Mr. Simon Hughes: That might be unwise.

Mr. Hughes: Perhaps a cashcard would be better.

I am advised that the Barclays bank building cannot be used as a station entrance because, given the location of the escalators, that would put it on the "paid" side of the fare gates—apparently those escalators cannot be moved. The entrance must be further south than the Barclays site would allow.

Planning consent will be sought from the London borough of Southwark for 31 to 37 Borough high street. A planning brief is being prepared to outline the acceptable uses and developments. I am advised that no undertakings to build residential property were given, but I appreciate the emphasis that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey put on the importance of such property. Reading between the lines of the instruction that I have been given, I believe that this matter should be taken up, with vigour, with Southwark borough council. I accept that it is an important one.

Mr. Simon Hughes: At present those properties are used for residential and commercial purposes. I understand that the implication was that that mix of use would continue and, obviously, this matter should be resolved. I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) appreciates that I am keen that London Underground—it will acquire the site if the Bill goes through—should support such a mixed development. It will be responsible for the redevelopment and it should not seek to replace the small amount of residential accommodation with a non-residential development.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. It is important that there should be a mixed development. The promoters will have noted the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The planning brief will be prepared shortly and it is important that those who want the mixed development to be retained should put their argument strongly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate made me think about a film that is known by a different title in the industry. "A Bridge Too Far" is often known as "A reel too long". If we have a bridge too far for LRT, will it be known as "Granny Dripping's steps"? I am sure that we are all impressed by my hon. Friend's enormous concern for his constituency. Those of us who have worked with my hon. Friend in the House and outside know that to be his customary concern, which is of prime importance to him.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making a speech of reasonable length and he made his points forcefully. My hon. Friend will know that I am not trying to soft-soap him. If I wanted to do that I should have intervened and sought to curtail his speech. My hon. Friend has expressed the concerns of any hon. Member seeking to protect the rights of his constituents.

My hon. Friend raised specific questions about undertakings that were given in the past, some way back. He asked what they meant in terms of LRT and British Rail and what liabilities they may or may not have. Those issues must be explored in great detail at the meeting that my hon. Friend is to have with the chairman and other officials of LRT.

The cost of building the bridge must also be examined. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate has had great experience of local government in London and he will be aware that the cost of anything fluctuates depending on the hoped-for result at that time. I am sure that he will pursue the matter with vigour.

I am unable to answer my hon. Friend's question about clause 24, which relates to the London Transport Act 1963, and section 2 of the London Transport Act 1976. He asked whether section 2 refers to foul sewers and/or fresh water. I have asked the promoters to prepare an answer for my hon. Friend as it is important that the matter should be got right.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) for their support for the Bill. It is important for London, for every single London constituent, for every Member who represents London and for every hon. Member whose constituents travel to London. I urge the House to give the Bill the Second Reading that it deserves.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed.

Environmental Assessment

Motion made and Question proposed,

That, with effect from the beginning of the next Session of Parliament, the following Standing Order be made:

'27A.—(1) Subject to paragraph (8) below, in the case of a Bill authorising the carrying out of works the nature and extent of which are specified in the Bill on land so specified, there shall be deposited on or before 4th December in the Private Bill Office and at the Public Departments at which copies of the Bill are required to be deposited under Standing Order 39, either

(a) a copy or copies (as specified by paragraph (2) below) of an environmental statement containing, in relation to the works authorised by the Bill, the information set out in Schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (referred to below as "Schedule 3") or such of that information as the Secretary of State may in any particular case direct, or

(b) a copy or copies (as so specified) of a direction by the Secretary of State that no such statement is necessary in relation to the works authorised by the Bill.

(2) The number of copies required to be deposited under paragraph (1)(a) or (b) above shall be three in the case of a deposit at the Department of the Environment and one in any other case.

(3) Where any such works authorised by a Bill relate to two or more distinct projects each project may be treated separately for the purposes of paragraph (1) above; and the references in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of that paragraph to the works authorised by the Bill shall accordingly be construed, where the paragraph applies separately to each project, as references to the works comprised in that project.

(4) Notwithstanding any direction given as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, any environmental statement of which copies are deposited under this Order shall contain the summary (referred to below as "the non-technical summary") required by paragraph (2)(e) and, where material, paragraph 4 of Schedule 3.

(5) Where the Secretary of State has given a direction as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, a copy of the direction shall be deposited with every copy of the environmental statement deposited under this Order; and every copy of a direction so deposited or deposited under paragraph (1)(b) above shall be accompanied by a statement by the Secretary of State of his reasons for giving the direction.

(6) Copies of every environmental statement deposited under this Order shall be made available for inspection, and for sale at a reasonable price, on and after 4th December, at the offices at which copies of the Bill are required to be made available under Standing Order 4A; and there shall also be made available separately on and after that date at those offices, for inspection and for sale at a reasonable price, copies of the non-technical summary.

(7) The reference to Schedule 3 in this Order is a reference to that Schedule as amended from time to time and includes a reference to the corresponding provision of any regulations which re-enact the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988, with or without amendment; and references to particular paragraphs of Schedule 3 shall be construed accordingly.

(8) This Order does not require the deposit of copies of an environmental statement in relation to any works for which planning permission has been granted.'.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Speaker has selected the following amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing):

(a), in line 7, leave out 'either (a)'.
(b), in line 12, leave out from 'or' to end of line 13.
(c), in line 12, leave out 'of that' and insert 'additional'.
(d), in line 13, leave out from 'direct' to end of line 15.
(f), in line 16, leave out '(a) or (b)'.
(h), in line 21, leave out 'references' and insert 'reference'.
(i), in line 21, leave out 'sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of'.
(j), in line 25, leave out from '(4)' to end.
(k), in line 29, leave out paragraph (5).

I suggest that it would be for the convenience of the House if we were to debate the motion and the amendments together. If the hon. Member wishes to move his amendments formally later, I shall give him the opportunity to do so.

8.50 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am obliged to you for that introduction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What you have suggested is what I, given time, may do. We have reached this business a little later than we expected. It is important that, when there is a grievance, the House should discuss a single bridge over the Metropolitan line, but we have now moved to very important matters relating to environmental legislation that will affect the whole country for years—possibly 10, 20 or even 50 years. The change in Standing Orders relating to what is wrongly called private legislation can determine what Committees of the House may take in evidence and what they recommend to the House. Indeed, a Committee may even dispose of a Bill before sending it back to us. These are not small matters; they are the ball-bearings on which the wheels of democracy turn. The purpose of this debate is to determine whether the House should agree to new Standing Order No. 27A concerning private business.

In principle, everybody agrees that there should be such a Standing Order, introducing a near-requirement for an environment assessment to accompany all Bills requiring works to be carried out. However, there are several question marks over what has happened. First, there is the question whether the procedure that the Department of

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the Environment has used in respect of the proposed Standing Order, which, although it has been moved by the Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, clearly has the Government's understanding. Secondly, there are questions about the extent to which this measure is good enough and about the terms in which it opts out of the requirement for an environmental assessment.

These matters are not altogether simple, but, had there been environmental assessments for previous Bills, such legislation as the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, theLyndhurst Bypass Bill, the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill, the River Calder (Welbeck Site) Bill, the Avon Light Rail Transit Bill, the Midland Metro Bill, the Greater Manchester (Light Rail Transport) Bill, and hybrid Bills, such as the Severn Bridges Bill, the Channel Tunnel Bill and the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, might have gone a different way. In the future, such Bills—in so far as there will be such Bills—could be affected by this Standing Order. There is, for instance, the expected Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

The matter has been somewhat muddied because, to date, the Secretary of State for Transport has announced the scope of the Bills that are expected to be removed from the purview of the House in a Bill which is likely to come before us in the autumn. We have learnt that that measure will include Bills relating to main railways, light railways, waterways, ports and harbours. Thus, a good deal of private legislation will not come before the House and, therefore, will not be subject to an environmental assessment, which, in principle, is accepted by everybody.

At 2.30 pm on 13 March, the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means moved a clutch of new Standing Orders, including Nos. 204A and 208A, which removed the powers of Members to debate certain amendments tabled by Members of this House or by Members of another place. Unfortunately, we did not have an opportunity to debate those Standing Orders. Perhaps the fault was partly mine. The matters were controversial. On that day I was able to object to this Standing Order but, through inadvertence, did not object to the rest. However, we now have an opportunity to discuss this very important matter of environmental assessment.

I wish to deal first with the procedural background to the Standing Order. Then I shall deal with private Bill procedure and with consultations about the Standing Order. Finally, I shall discuss the amendments, which I commend to the House.

I do not think that anybody objects to the 2.30 pm procedure. Everybody understands it. Indeed, tonight's debate on the London underground was a result of it. However, that changes in Standing Orders could be approved on the nod at 2.30 pm was a surprise to everybody.

I understand that the proposed change is partly the result of an EC environmental directive which requires that all planning inquiries shall have before them an environmental assessment of the planning application. This Standing Order deals with that matter in the context of private Bills. On 26 February, the Department of the Environment sent to interested organisations a letter saying that this was to be done. It asked those organisations to submit their comments by 23 April. Unfortunately, for reasons which are to some extent wrapped in mystery, before the end of that consultation period the authorities of the House, or the Department of the Environment—or perhaps both—put down the draft Standing Order on 13 March. But for chance, we might not have been able to debate it at all. It might have gone through on the nod, together with the other Standing Orders, to some of which I have referred.

I hope that the Minister can provide some clarification. Everybody, whatever his political views, agrees that environmental matters are important. It is therefore very unfortunate that such matters should be dealt with in this way. Bodies such as the Nature Conservancy Council, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Countryside Commission were caught a little short, to say the least. One reason is that, although hon. Members who peruse the full vote of the House could have known that the Standing Order would come before us, there was some difficulty as the full vote is a rather expensive item.

Hon. Members receive papers from the Vote Office, and are obliged to the Deliverer of the Vote and his staff for their efficiency. Perhaps we are unaware, therefore, of the degree to which official parliamentary documents are not easily available to members of the public. Yet they are public documents. If people are not aware of what Parliament proposes to do, they do not have an opportunity to alert Members to precipitate debates such as this or to inform themselves and participate in the process. That is true not only of individuals but of bodies. The many important bodies which I mentioned were not really aware of that. They told me that they did not take the full vote, despite their intense and proper statutory interests. They have statutory duties in respect of privately promoted legislation.

I took some trouble to find out the position and I understand that, if one orders the vote as a private person or as a body, one cannot do so on a fixed sum but must pay retrospectively for each page. *Hansard* of 8 May sets out the current cost of that vote in various Sessions. I shall not deal with exceptionally long Sessions, but the cost of that vote in the 1988-89 Session was £4,800. That is disgusting news to many hon. Members and to many long-serving staff members. I asked for an estimate for the current Session, given the size of the order, and was told that it would be £3,800. From 14 April, HMSO has put up the cost of the vote from 13p to 20p, an increase of 7p per page —a 40 per cent. increase. Will the Minister draw that matter of public importance to the attention of the Minister responsible for HMSO and the Leader of the House?

I draw the Minister's attention also to the response to the letter dated 26 February signed by Mr. C. L. L. Braun of the planning and development control division of the Department of the Environment. Paragraph 3 of that letter said:

"The Department may wish to make responses to this letter available to Parliament and open for public inspection in the Department's library."

That would not have been much good because the order came to the House before the responses had arrived. I made further inquiries about that and, in a parliamentary answer dated 16 May from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, it is clear that the Government received

"35 responses to the consultation paper, most of which welcomed, and none of which object to, the principle of requiring environmental assessment for private Bills for

works projects. A list of responses has been sent to the libraries of both Houses and copies of the responses have been placed in the Department of the Environment library at Marsham Street."

Leaving aside the fact that we would not have had the opportunity to see those responses because of the events of 13 March, I would not wish to trail to the library at Marsham street—although it is not far—to read those responses. I should have thought that responses relating to Standing Orders should be placed in the Library, as was envisaged in that helpful letter.

When that possibility was dangled before the respondents, why were those responses not available? They have come to the attention of various Members and some of my hon. Friends have been given documents, although by the respondents and not by the Government, who placed a list in the Library.

Private Bill procedure is highly controversial and will be the subject of a Bill in the autumn, a preview of which was given in a press release today. A joint Select Committee was set up by both Houses of Parliament. It reported in the 1987-88 Session in document HC 625. Paragraph 80 of that report recommended that an environmental assessment should be incorporated in all private Bill procedure. The Committee went on to say that there was some doubt about whether under article 1(5) of the directive.

"the project would be subject to environmental assessment, and. . .if so, what information would be required to be submitted in an environmental statement. The Secretary of State's determination should be required to be deposited and advertised along with the bill, together, where he has determined that the project would otherwise be subject to environmental assessment, with an environmental statement containing the specified information. The documents submitted should be required to be produced to Examiners, and the promoter should be required to show that any environmental statement submitted by him contains the specified information".

As it is not fully clear to me, will the Minister explain why the Government claimed in evidence to the Committee that such a step was necessary? We may need to determine whether it is required by the relevant article of the EC directive, but surely that should be a matter for the House and the Committee. Why should it be a matter for the Minister to decide? Of course, the Government will have a view, which they will make known, as they make their views known under the private Bill procedure—we had an example of that tonight. But why should the Government be the determinant and the adjudicator of what the Committee on the private Bill may or may not do?

I should have thought that, on a matter of pure principle, the House should question whether such action came within the Standing Order. I do not know whether, within its Standing Orders, the House has ever bound itself to statute. The motion states that the Standing Order should contain

"information set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (referred to below as 'Schedule 3')"—

the current statute. If that legislation changed, the Standing Order would also change. Is it right for the Select Committee discussing a private Bill to be tied to the terms of a statute that can be changed at will by a Minister, by a negative order?

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I support what he has said. Although he and I disagree on one aspect of the implementation of the motion, does the hon. Gentleman accept that another disadvantage of the proposition is that if, for example, on a European directive such as that relating to Government road-building policy in Twyford Down, Hampshire, the Government believe that they are acting legitimately, but the European Community decides that the Government are not, it is preferable for the House to be able to be a second, internal court of reference? That would prevent us from being hauled up and prosecuted by the European Community. We should not have to rely merely on what is increasingly shown to be a defective check mechanism on Government, the result of which is the prosecution of Britain, because the House of Commons could have protected us from both the prosecution and the bad policy.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for further underlining my point.

Some of the respondents, including the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Ramblers Association, have said that the Minister's certification in proposed Standing Order No. 27A(1) *(a)* and *(b)* is a determination against which there is no appeal. I should imagine that the Select Committee could not appeal, unless it came back to the House and said that the Standing Order was too tight and it wanted to act outside it.

As written, Standing Order No. 27A(1) *(a)* permits the Secretary of State to certify that less than the information in schedule 3 of the order can be supplied as part of the environmental assessment. It is a question not just of whether there is to be an environmental assessment but of whether it will be complete. That gives the Secretary of State even greater power. Will the Minister say why that power exists? He managed to persuade the Select Committee, which did not go into it in its report.

Paragraph 80 of the Select Committee report states:

"The Department of Environment, or other appropriate department, should be invited to report on the environmental statement to the committee on the bill in each House, who should take the statement and the report into account in considering the Bill."

That is a good idea, is it not? The Minister would make a statement about the environmental statement, which is produced by the promoter on some sort of quality machinery into which we cannot go tonight. I think that it is being used for planning and it is a bit controversial in itself.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) catches your eye, Sir Paul, because he is an expert on the matter. It was discussed not long ago in the House. It is a good idea for there to be another statement from the Department of the Environment, but despite the recommendation by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure in paragraph 80 of its report, which mentions the Minister's power, the suggestion is not included in the proposed Standing Order. Although we like the idea in principle—I do not think that any hon. Member would disagree—we should like the Minister to tell us why the recommendation that there should be a neutral commentary from the Department of the Environment has been excluded from the Standing Order.

We have a not very satisfactory train of events, bearing in mind that green matters and the environment are top of the political agenda—or so we are told. In the new unified Germany, one party has changed the attitude of two or

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three of the major parties in four or five years. That can happen in a democratic state. I am glad to say that all three parties have been moved in that direction too. The summation of that move in terms of private Bills is the proposed Standing Order. However, I hope that I have said enough to show that the way in which there has been half-hearted or mistimed consultation in many respects draws a number of question marks.

I have tabled what appears to be a complicated group of amendments. I have done so because one has to have paving and consequential amendments. They amount to two or three pretty simple amendments. Amendment (a) is a paving amendment for the main amendment (d), which seeks to leave out subsection (1)(b) which deals with ministerial power. If that is agreed, amendments (f), (h), (i), (j) and (k) are consequential. They follow amendment (d) for all practical purposes and we can discount them. I want the Minister to consider the merits of the amendments or at least to tell us why he cannot accept them.

If the Minister cannot accept the amendments, will he accept an alternative amendment? I should like to suggest that we include a provision in line 12 that there should be such additional information as the Secretary of State may require. The information should be that required by schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 and there should be additional information if the Secretary of State wishes. That seems to be common sense. It would give the Minister the discretion to give additional information if he thought that it was necessary.

If the Minister will not accept that proposal, he should surely give at least the information required in schedule 3. I should prefer there to be more information, as proposed in amendment (c). If the Minister does not like that, the information should be nothing less than that required in schedule 3, as proposed in amendment (b). Neither amendment (b) nor amendment (c) has consequential amendments.

The House wants a conclusion to be reached to this matter, as private Bills will come forward in the next Session. The country also wants a conclusion to be reached so that private Bills, in so far as they exist, deal properly with the environment. It would be a great pity if we proceeded too quickly. In view of the irregularities that have occurred and perhaps one or two thoughts that may occur to the Minister as a result of the debate—the purpose of debates is that angles may occur on which we may all agree—the Minister will agree to consider the matter. I hope that he will come back, if not with a perfect set of Standing Orders, at least with some improvements and allow some time for consultations to take place with outside bodies, as they are clearly interested in the matter.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Because of the way in which the package was put to the House before Easter and the fact that certain other measures have been approved, I plead with my hon. Friend to allow this environmental assessment matter to be passed on the basis that the House could always further amend it. It would be a pity not to have any environmental assessment in the Standing Orders while we wait for a perfect one. I plead with my hon. Friend to allow the matter to proceed. We can then press for a stronger measure to replace it in future.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. It highlights the dilemma that I was pointing out. Such dilemmas frequently occur in democratic assemblies. I understand what my hon. Friend means. It would be helpful for the Minister to say that a second bite at the cherry will be available.

I have no wish to prevent environmental assessments from being applied to a private Bill. It would be wrong if they were not. However, it would also be a pity if the rules relating to environmental assessment were not those which environmental bodies that have a statutory responsibility —I have named many of them—and all of us who are concerned with environmental affairs thought were reasonably satisfactory or, still less, that had not had the consideration and discussion that they merit.

I have said enough to show that there have been some procedural hiccups. They could have been mistakes—I am not by any means trying to bounce anybody. They were probably unfortunate timetable misalignments. If that undertaking could be given it would assist hon. Members.

We now have less than three quarters of an hour left. I warn the Minister that, bearing in mind the choices that will come before the nation in the next few weeks or months, we should not have an argument about the Standing Orders. It would be a great pity if the Standing Orders or their imperfections became a matter of public debate on the hustings. Whether they do so depends on the spirit of the Minister's reply.

9.18 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I shall be relatively brief and follow the tenor of what the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said. It is clearly to be welcomed that environmental assessment should be applied to private legislation. I was a member of the Committee that dealt two and a half years ago with the environmental assessment proposal in relation to legislation in general. One of the matters on which I commented was that the proposals did not apply to private legislation. Some of the most environmentally controversial proposals that have been debated in the House have been in private legislation.

The hon. Member for Newham, South rightly referred to some such proposals. One year we had a fanatical, although not a partisan, debate about the Okehampton bypass, which intruded into Dartmoor. I dissented from the view of our late and lamented friend David Penhaligon, who had campaigned for the bypass to speed the journey of his constituents and of business travellers to and from Cornwall. I understood his view, but I took a different view, as did others who defended the integrity of that part of Dartmoor.

As the hon. Member for Newham, South mentioned, controversial proposals were also made to develop Felixstowe dock and harbour. The proposal would have destroyed environmental wetlands, breeding and migration grounds and important ecological areas.

Controversial proposals will continue to be made. As long as the House exempts any section of the legislative process from environmental assessment, the application of the objectives of the European Community, which should

be imposed across all legislative procedures, will be defective because there will be a way through the assessment requirements.

The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill showed that there is often an alternative. It is often open to the Government to introduce a public Bill on a matter which could be the subject of a private Bill, to leave the matter to a private Bill or create a hybrid Bill. If the legislation were a private Bill, it would be exempt from environmental assessment, but if it were a public Bill it would not.

The exemption from environmental assessment requirements was foolish and was not helpful environmentally. We are left with the problem, which the hon. Member for Newham, South rightly sought to highlight by tabling his amendments, that certain overriding powers are left in the hands of the Secretary of State. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his adept footwork. When the matter came before the House in March, I was unable to attend because I was committed to be somewhere else that afternoon. When the Order Paper came through my door, I noticed that the matter was due to be discussed and I hoped that someone would object to the motion. It caught me and other hon. Members unawares. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, South for objecting and allowing tonight's debate to take place.

If we are to allow a second exemption to remain, to allow the Secretary of State effectively to direct that certain matters are not to be covered, we shall again allow the application of the EC objective to suffer the fate of being defective. That would be wrong. I understand the view of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that it is better to have half an environmental assessment than none at all. None the less, I hope that the House will not leave the matter and fail to deal with it further.

There are questions to be asked about the timetable. It is a pretty rum procedure to announce a consultation period and then to announce before the end of that period what has been decided, let alone without allowing any time to consider the results, whether by publishing them in the House of Commons Library or the Department of the Environment library. I have never believed that the Government were hot on consultation. Indeed, when they proceed with consultation they never seem to take heed of the results. But at least they could have the decency to observe the procedures and make the timetable follow the pattern of consultation, conclusion, publication of results, consideration and then proposition. That would make a courteous change.

I have a few obvious questions which I can put collectively. In my intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Newham, South, I referred to the topical news from Brussels that Britain is likely to be prosecuted by the European Community for failure to apply the European directive on environmental assessment to some of the more controversial aspects—that is putting it mildly—of the Government's road programme.

The most controversial is the proposed bypass around Winchester. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), who is present, has been involved in the matter of the bypass for the M3. I have been to see the site and it seems to be environmental vandalism of the worst order. It is entirely to be objected to.

I hope that even hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Newham, South, who are not great supporters of the legislative ramifications of the European Community, will concede that if the European Community is to be the salvation in this case, it is better that it comes to the rescue than that no one does so.

Certainly, residents of Hampshire, the people of Winchester and its surroundings, are looking for any saviour, and the European Community will be a welcome saviour if it saves Twyford Down. Do we not risk the exemption of the Twyford Downs of the future if we accept such a restricted environmental assessment? Can the Minister give us examples of possible exemptions from the list cited by the hon. Member for Newham, South? There is scope for Ministers to decree that certain projects can be exempted, irrespective of their environmental impact. If we are to have an environmental assessment it must be done properly.

Finally—this is an important procedural matter—what guarantee does the House have that sufficient expertise will be available to allow the Committees that scrutinise private Bills to have environmental assessments done properly? Almost since my first months in the House I have argued that all legislation should come here with an environmental assessment in the memorandum. Our procedures are defective in this respect, even though the royal commission on environmental pollution made a similar recommendation in one of its reports some years ago. If the information is to be available to all Members, there must be adequate personnel—a support staff so that the Committee procedures of the House are adequate for the job. We must have the results of proper research into the environmental impact of all proposed legislation, whether primary or secondary.

My fear is that, although the Government are giving a welcome nod in the direction of environmental assessments for private legislation, that is not a sign of a wholesale commitment. The Department of the Environment is aiming more for the veneer of environmental acceptability than for a commitment to that goal. That is sad.

I hope that the Government do not think that, having introduced this measure, they will be able to sail swimmingly into the next election and say, "We have made sure that the practices of the House are environmentally sound. We are doing everything to the highest environmental standards." In fact, the measure follows the de minimis principle: it is the least that could have been done. There are two major holes in it. I am unhappy with it, but it is just acceptable, given that the alternative would be nothing at all.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): The Chairman of Ways and Means has done the House a service by tabling new Standing Order No. 27A, requiring environmental assessment of projects which come before this House for approval in works Bills.

A provision of this nature was proposed by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure and has, I believe, the support of both sides of the House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester South, and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham) indicated the Government's support when he was Leader of the House in April 1989. The Standing Order has been drafted in consultation with my Department. We set out the arrangements that we propose

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for considering applications for a direction under paragraph (1)(b) in a consultation paper issued on 26 February.

I am tempted to leave the Government's statement at that. We support the Standing Order; it is important to introduce it now so that it can apply to next Session's Bills. But that is a matter for the House to decide. However, the intervention of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) draws me to comment in rather more detail, as do the remarks of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

I am sorry that the discussion of this serious subject has been somewhat tarnished by ridiculous allegations about procedural issues. Some suggestion that the Department had been at fault was conveyed by the way that the hon. Member for Newham, South went through his list of dates. He made much of the fact that the House authorities tabled the proposed Standing Order on 13 March, well before the end of the consultation period on 23 April. Had he done any homework, and read the consultation paper issued on 26 February, he would have read in the first sentence of the first paragraph:

"An amendment to the Parliamentary Standing Orders for private Bill procedures is expected to be tabled shortly".

That might have prepared even the casual reader for the fact that an amendment was about to appear. If he had taken the trouble to go further through the consultation paper he would have found at annex A the proposed new Standing Order No. 27A. Accompanying the letter from the Department of the Environment sent out on 26 February is the full text of the Standing Order that was subsequently tabled by the House authorities on 13 March.

Mr. Spearing: I was aware of what was in the appendix, but anybody reading that document would have assumed that the order would be tabled but not debated and agreed until after the end of the consultation period. In a sense, tabling is publication and the document was published. Surely that is a common sense interpretation. Even if it is not, it is the interpretation that many people, including the relevant organisations, assumed to be correct.

Mr. Yeo: I am trying to rebut the absurd allegation that my Department has been trying to stifle debate or spring surprises on the House. The consultation paper plainly stated that the Standing Order would shortly be tabled. In addition, the full text of the proposed Standing Order was included with the consultation paper on 26 February. If hon. Members had wished to object, as the hon. Member for Newham, South objected, to this part of the matter in March, it would have been perfectly easy to ensure that a debate took place. No consultee and no hon. Member could possibly have been taken by surprise by the procedural timetable followed by the Department of the Environment in this matter.

The comments by the hon. Member for Newham, South about where the consultation responses were being kept were also rather absurd and belittled the seriousness of the subject. I am sorry that he finds No. 2 Marsham street too far away. My Department used to deposit all responses to our consultation papers in the Libraries of both Houses. That so overburdened the Libraries that we changed the practice and in the past few years we have been depositing a list of responses and did so in this case. Proceeding in such a way does not smack of excessive secrecy or of a desire to be obstructive. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to have a copy of any of the responses I shall be happy to send one to him, and by going to the Library he can find out who responded. The cost of the official paper is not a matter for me, but I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the question of costs, item 31 in the brief from the Council for the Protection of Rural England states:

"Environmental statements should be available free to all interested parties in a Bill. As an absolute minimum, this should include all those who participated in the EA process and preparation of the ES, and petitioners against the Bill."

Hon. Members are not criticising the Department; at least, I am not. We are appalled at the sheer cost of legitimate objection. Has the Department any constructive views about how those who want to object, not frivolously, can be helped financially? Because of the financial implications, one has to be extremely careful before embarking on an objection.

Mr. Yeo: The issue of the cost of getting copies of papers is more a matter for the House authorities than for the Department of the Environment. An objector will have to weigh up costs, as he would do before objecting to any planning application. If professional advice is taken the cost of that must be borne in mind.

I shall now deal with the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Newham, South. He would claim that they would strengthen the Standing Order requirements by removing the opportunity for promoters to seek the Secretary of State's direction that an environmental statement is not required.

Mr. Spearing: Or less than the order.

Mr. Yeo: We shall come to that later. The amendments would also mean that the information to be provided might be more restricted than that set out in the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988. The hon. Gentleman has also proposed that the promoters might be required to provide additional information where both Houses of Parliament so resolve.

In the Government's view, these amendments to the Standing Order are misconceived. The scheme proposed by the Standing Order, and the arrangements on which we have consulted, is that projects approved by private Bill require environmental assessment on the same basis as projects requiring planning permission—subject only to differences arising essentially from the different nature of the procedures involved. Under the European directive which the 1988 regulations implement, environmental assessment is required for all projects listed in annex I to the directive, and for any projects listed in annex II which are likely to have significant environmental effects. Under clause 14 of the Planning and Compensation Bill, which is before the House, the Secretary of State will be able to add to the classes of project requiring environmental assessment, but preparing an environmental statement is a costly business and should be required of the promoters of projects only where it is really necessary—that is when the project is likely to have significant environmental effects.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Standing Orders are designed to parallel what is happening on applications that occur under planning legislation. If, at some point,

planning legislation is improved, to make environmental assessment stronger, would it not be logical for the House then to amend Standing Orders to take those changes into account?

Mr. Yeo: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. However, it will be for the House to decide at that time. As the procedures are starting off in parallel, it would seem to be only sensible to argue that they should continue in parallel if changes are made in the requirements of the planning law.

The decision whether a project falls in that category requires the exercise of judgment. That is why the planning regulations provide for a procedure under which the local planning authority considers the need for environmental assessment, with the Secretary of State having the last word in case of dispute. The fact that a project requires approval through the private Bill procedure does not necessarily mean that it is likely to have significant environmental effects, so that environmental assessment would be appropriate. That is why the Standing Order —in accordance with the Joint Committee's recommendation—enables the promoter to go to the Secretary of State to seek a direction that environmental assessment is not required in particular cases.

Basically, that is the argument for rejecting the main amendment. It is interesting that only one response to the consultation paper proposed to remove the Secretary of State's direction-making function. To do so would significantly alter the scheme of the Standing Order in a manner that has not been considered by the promoters or parliamentary agents. Therefore, I recommend that the House should reject the amendments.

Perhaps I should take this opportunity to report to the House what the consultees have said in reply to the consultation. We received 35 replies. As has been said, a list of them has been placed in the Library of the House. The Welsh Office carried out a parallel consultation exercise, to which five responses were received. The respondents to these consultations include environmental interests—notably the Council for the Protection of Rural England—public and local authorities, professional organisations and a few promoters, notably British Rail. I shall refer briefly to four main areas of comment.

Some respondents suggest that, because of the strict timetable to which private Bills must adhere, the arrangements for environmental assessment should also follow a formalised timetable. In particular, they contend that the annual June deadline for applications for a Secretary of State direction is too late because if he decides that environmental assessment is required there will not be enough time to enable an adequate environmental statement to be prepared and deposited by 4 December. They therefore suggest that promoters should be required to seek a direction much earlier than June.

The Government view is that in most cases promoters of private legislation will know well in advance whether their proposals are likely to require assessment. Environmental statements take time to prepare and it is good practice for work on them to begin at an early stage in the development process. So if it is clear that environmental assessment is needed, the promoter should simply get on with it. Some respondents have contended that promoters should have to seek a direction in every case, but that would be unnecessarily bureaucratic and time consuming.

Similarly, if it is clear that a project is not likely to have significant effects, there is every reason for the promoter's seeking the Secretary of State's certificate sooner rather than later. If, however, the case is finely balanced, I would hope that the promoter would decide at an early stage that he will provide a statement. I therefore do not expect that cases will often hit the June deadline. Even where they do, and the Secretary of State directs that environmental assessment is not needed, no problem will arise. So the problem will arise only if a direction is refused in a case where the preparation of an adequate environmental statement cannot be completed by 4 December. In such a case, it seems to us that the reasonable effect of the provisions will be to require the promoter to postpone his Bill to the following Session. We shall be preparing guidance which will clarify these points.

This does, of course, raise the question of what is an adequate environmental statement, on which a number of the consultation respondents also commented. They commented that private Bill Committees do not have the necessary expertise to interpret and assess environmental statements, and that such statements should be subject to independent review; some suggest that the Secretary of State should comment on the quality of the statement as part of his report to Parliament on the Bill.

I acknowledge that the idea of an independent review body is attractive, but there are practical difficulties. What would its relationship to Parliament be? In the last resort it must be for the House to decide whether it can approve a project on the basis of the information in front of it. A private Bill Committee has a great ability to require additional information if it is dissatisfied with what the promoter has provided, and petitioners can also obtain information through the cross-examination process. So I am by no means as despondent as are some of the respondents about the quality control that Parliament can exercise.

The Secretary of State's reports to Parliament will seek to be as helpful to the House as possible. He will certainly check that the statement complies with the terms of schedule 3 to the 1988 regulations, and of any direction that he has given, but I do not agree that he should undertake to say whether he considers the environmental implications of a proposal, as set out in the environmental statement, to be acceptable: that must be for Parliament to decide. The Secretary of State must also avoid taking sides on issues on which he may subsequently have to adjudicate in a quasi-judicial capacity—for instance, on a related planning appeal.

I do not dismiss lightly the concerns that have been expressed about the quality of environmental statements. As indicated in last year's environment White Paper, my Department is commissioning research designed to lead to the issue of guidance on good practice in the preparation and evaluation of environmental statements. We are currently considering tenders for the first part of this research, and we shall certainly carefully watch the experience with statements submitted with private Bills.

A third range of comments on the consultation paper urged that there should be wider consultation and involvement of the public in the environmental assessment process. The consultation paper made it clear that, when preparing an environmental statement, promoters should consult specified bodies similar to those that they would be advised to consult under the environmental assessment regulations if they were proceeding by way of a planning

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application. That is to enable those bodies to make available any relevant, non-confidential, information that they possess. The bodies concerned would include the Countryside Commission, English Nature, English Heritage, and such other bodies as the Secretary of State may decide in any particular case.

There is no existing provision that could be used to require promoters to consult any particular bodies, nor to require those bodies to make relevant information available to the promoters. Neither is that something which could be required by means of amendments to Standing Orders. We therefore intend to bring forward appropriate legislation at a suitable opportunity. In the meantime, the Department will expect promoters to consult appropriate bodies, including the local planning authority for the area, on a non-statutory basis. We shall also advise promoters to consider consulting relevant non-statutory bodies and the public in the locality of their projects. A number of respondents urged the need for such consultations.

The fourth area of comment concerns the final paragraph of the consultation paper, in which it was proposed that where a private Bill concerns more than one project it might be appropriate for the Secretary of State to give a direction that environmental assessment was not required for some of those projects only. The comments that have been made reasonably argue that, where projects are related to each other, they should not be considered separately for environmental assessment purposes. I can assure the House that in such cases we would expect promoters to consider the likely environmental effects of all related projects, but where a Bill covers genuinely disparate projects the need for environmental assessment for each will be considered on its merits.

As I said, the responses overall welcomed the proposals. I am satisfied that they will work as set out in the consultation paper. However, I undertake to keep the operation of the Department's functions under review.

Of course, we can expect the demand for works Bills to decline. Last June, the Government put forward proposals in response to the Joint Committee's report under which the approval of railway and light rail projects, and a wider range of harbour measures, would be considered and approved outside Parliament. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced last Friday that the responses to that consultation had been broadly favourable, and that the Government intend to proceed with legislation at the earliest opportunity. The new order-making procedure would include provision for public inquiries and for environmental assessment of schemes likely to have significant environmental effects.

If that legislation is enacted, there will be far fewer proposals which need to come before the House in works Bills and to which the new Standing Order 27A will apply. That does not diminish the importance of the proposal before the House. I strongly commend it to the House, and point out that if we do not agree to the Standing Order tonight—and I believe that this point concerns the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—there must be a risk that the new arrangements could not be implemented until the 1992-93 Session. So although we disagree with the amendments of the hon. Member for Newham, South, I urge the House to agree to the motion.

9.46 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): We welcome the introduction of environmental assessment into the private Bill procedure, and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) for making possible tonight's debate. He presented his case thoroughly, and if time had allowed he would have described in more detail ways in which the measure could be improved. His amendments would have improved the Standing Order, but as we want its principles adopted, I am sure that my hon. Friend will not seek to press them.

As to the consultation procedure, the comments of the Council for the Protection of Rural England are particularly apposite. There is a strong case for some form of independent agency to undertake environmental assessments. There is bound to be an element of distrust when the developers themselves are responsible for making an assessment.

As to the role of the Secretary of State, in the case of Teesside power station, the CPRE lodged an objection with the Commission over whether or not the works associated with the building of that power station should have formed part of the overall environmental assessment. The Secretary of State chose not to follow that course, and his decision will be challenged. Certainly it seems to me that the associated works form part of the whole scheme —and in any private Bill, priority should be given to consideration of whether the environmental assessment should cover the whole of the works in question.

I hope that the Government will accept that there is a great deal which could be done to improve the Standing Order. I appreciate the Minister's undertaking to keep an eye on the way that the matter develops and to be prepared to give the House an opportunity to improve environmental assessments further. Therefore, taking the Minister at his word, I hope that we shall have an opportunity to reconsider this subject in the not-too-distant future.

9.49 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I rise to speak briefly in support of the speeches by the hon. Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I also agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that the Chairman of Ways and Means has done us a great service by tabling this motion, and I strongly support it.

I understand and share the misgivings of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey about exemptions. It worries me, but we must be happy that the order is tabled at all and support it.

It is absolutely right that the same environmental assessment provisions should apply equally to privately financed and to state financed road construction. I noted with interest the reference by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to the timing of the motion as regards a rumour—I do not know how accurate it is. I noticed an article in *The Observer* about a European Commission proposal to prosecute the United Kingdom Government over their plans for the M3 at Twyford Down. That prosecution would be because the Government had failed to comply with the 1985 EC directive in a specific area.

The M3 at Winchester has been close to my heart for about 14 years. Many people in my constituency are appalled by the Government's proposals. Many more

cannot wait until the road is constructed. They want it finished as soon as possible, because they are totally frustrated for three reasons. The first is the seemingly endless delays amounting to about 20 years of which, according to my calculations on the back of an envelope, the Government rather than protestors have been responsible for 13 years, or 65 per cent. Secondly, they are frustrated by traffic delays because the Government have not constructed the flyover bridge proposed at Hockly traffic lights. Thirdly, they are frustrated by the death tally on the present road, but they note that the Government have made virtually no attempt to upgrade the present bypass to make it safer.

I do not blame the present Secretary of State for Transport, but I believe that the frustration has had a major impact. People have been frustrated so that they will accept anything, regardless of the environmental consequences, just to get the traffic through. The story is that delays on the road are costing industry to the south and west of Winchester £1 million a day. That would pay for a tunnel in less than six months, which puts it into proportion. The cause of the frustration is dubious. I do not believe that Ministers are at fault but they have over many years been given very questionable advice.

The Department of Transport's proposals for the M3 will smash through the most heavily protected piece of environment in our country—the most heavily protected area in the British Isles in terms of statutory protection, areas of outstanding natural beauty, sites of special scientific interest and so on. Statutory bodies such as the CPRE and English Heritage were not even invited to attend one of the inquiries to give evidence. The inquiry was therefore reopened, and there was yet more delay and frustration.

There are sound economic reasons for the 1985 EC directive. It is in Britain's interest to meet that directive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I realise that the hon. Member has a strong constituency interest, but I remind him that we are dealing with an amendment to Standing Orders. It is not appropriate to go into detail on a constituency matter.

Mr. Browne: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are considering the application of the rules to the private construction of roads. Probably the major proposal in the country affects my constituency—the private financing of the tunnel for the M3 at Winchester. That is why I have mentioned the case.

It is important, and it is in Britain's interest, to uphold the EC directive. Most of the other countries in Europe did not have such strict environmental requirements, so our business and commerce were losing.

It is important that the rules are upheld regarding the Standing Order change and the Government's policy on the construction of the proposed route at Winchester. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will urge the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for the Environment to take seriously and to review the proposals of the delegation that I led to the Secretary of State for Transport a few weeks ago. Members of Twyford Down Association proposed alternative private financing for the tunnel, which would pay not only for the protection but for the enhancement of the environment in that area and would ensure that the road was built as soon as possible.

I support the speeches of hon. Members and the motion.

9.56 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): It is a pity that we have not had enough time to debate the motion. I hope that this will be only part of the reform of private business, and that primary legislation will be passed so that environmental issues are dealt with under the planning procedures and not by the House.

The Government's response, issued by the Department of Transport on Friday, suggested that railway, harbour and waterway Bills will be taken out of the procedure. The Minister should consider removing estuary Bills. There are proposals to deal with the Severn, the Mersey, the Wash, and Morecambe bay. Almost any estuary in Britain is the subject of a proposal. The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill created controversy, and we should ensure that such Bills are subject to planning procedures rather than the private Bill procedure, otherwise they might take up much parliamentary time in the future.

I should have welcomed stronger environmental requirements in the Standing Order. I hope that we shall improve planning legislation to include better environmental assessments, and that the House ensures that it falls into line by amending the Standing Order.

It is important that the primary legislation is passed. I fear that if there is an October election it will get lost and the House will be unable to reform private Bills, which it urgently needs to do.

9.58 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall call the hon. Gentleman, but I remind the House that the procedure is a little complicated this evening. If the House wishes to come to a conclusion on the motion, I have to put the Question before 10 o'clock.

Mr. Dalyell: The motion is one of those cases in which the best could be the enemy of the good, and I support it. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) about estuary Bills.

I want to ask a question that bothers the Council for the Protection of Rural England and others. What is the position on the blank cheque given to the Secretary of State to exempt any private Bill from the environmental assessment requirements, at least without a proviso that the Secretary of State must determine that the project is unlikely to have any significant effects on the environment?

Hon. Members have nightmares about talking out legislation, so to be safer than safe, with that question I shall sit down.

Mr. Yeo: Paragraph 15 of the consultation paper pointed out that it is possible for the Select Committee to call for further environmental evidence, even if the Secretary of State has given a direction that no environmental assessment is necessary.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That, with effect from the beginning of the next Session of Parliament, the following Standing Order be made:—

'27A.—(1) Subject to paragraph (8) below, in the case of a Bill authorising the carrying out of works the nature and extent of which are specified in the Bill on land so specified, there shall be deposited on or before 4th December in the

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Private Bill Office and at the Public Departments at which copies of the Bill are required to be deposited under Standing Order 39, either

(a) a copy or copies (as specified by paragraph (2) below) of an environmental statement containing, in relation to the works authorised by the Bill, the information set out in Schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 (referred to below as "Schedule 3") or such of that information as the Secretary of State may in any particular case direct, or

(b) a copy or copies (as so specified) of a direction by the Secretary of State that no such statement is necessary in relation to the works authorised by the Bill.

(2) The number of copies required to be deposited under paragraph (1)(a) or (b) above shall be three in the case of a deposit at the Department of the Environment and one in any other case.

(3) Where any such works authorised by a Bill relates to two or more distinct projects each project may be treated separately for the purposes of paragraph (1) above; and the references in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of that paragraph to the works authorised by the Bill shall accordingly be construed, where the paragraph applies separately to each project, as references to the works comprised in that project.

(4) Notwithstanding any direction given as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, any environmental statement of which copies are deposited under this Order shall contain the summary (referred to below as "the non-technical summary") required by paragraph (2)(e) and, where material, paragraph 4 of Schedule 3.

(5) Where the Secretary of State has given a direction as mentioned in paragraph (1)(a) above, a copy of the direction shall be deposited with every copy of the environmental statement deposited under this Order; and every copy of a direction so deposited or deposited under paragraph (1)(b) above shall be accompanied by a statement by the Secretary of State of his reasons for giving the direction.

(6) Copies of every environmental statement deposited under this Order shall be made available for inspection, and for sale at a reasonable price, on and after 4th December, at the offices at which copies of the Bill are required to be made available under Standing Order 4A; and there shall also be made available separately on and after that date at those offices, for inspection and for sale at a reasonable price, copies of the non-technical summary.

(7) The reference to Schedule 3 in this Order is a reference to that Schedule as amended from time to time and includes a reference to the corresponding provision of any regulations which re-enact the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988, with or without amendment; and references to particular paragraphs of Schedule 3 shall be construed accordingly.

(8) This Order does not require the deposit of copies of an environmental statement in relation to any works for which planning permission has been granted.".

9.59 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not raise it in the previous debate for fear of losing that motion. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) mentioned the report in *The Observer*, and I wonder whether it will be possible for a Minister to make a statement in the next few days on whether Britain will be prosecuted. It affects not only Twyford Down, but also the east London river crossing approach road through Oxleas woods in my constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member's remarks will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench.

European Energy Charter

10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4936/91 on a European Energy Charter; and welcomes proposals for a Charter designed to promote an open, liberal and non-discriminatory energy market throughout Europe and to assist in restructuring the energy sectors of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union on a market basis.

I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate the proposal for a European energy charter. The Select Committee on European Legislation regarded the communication as being politically important. It was right to do so. Scutiny debates are frequently about the impact of the European Commission proposal on the United Kingdom or on the 12 member states of the Community. This one is different. It covers the whole of Europe—east and west, north and south.

No European energy policy can be forged in the 1990s or beyond if it does not take account of the emerging democracies of eastern Europe or of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union. They have suffered from all the vices of central planning, but none of the virtues of competition and free trade. Getting the energy industries right throughout the east, not least in the Soviet Union, which is so rich in natural resources, could be a catalyst for the transformation of their whole economies and their environments.

I believe that a European energy charter can provide a key to that transformation. It can bring major benefits to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union while also helping the more established European democracies, inside and outside the European Community. It can go further than the internal market by liberalising the energy sector across the whole of Europe.

The United Kingdom market and the United Kingdom have been in the forefront of the development of the internal market in energy and in other areas. The charter give us an important and welcome opportunity to go further in the energy sector, to cover more countries and to establish more liberal arrangements. The United Kingdom is one of the most competitive energy markets in the world. The Government have some of the greatest experience in supervising energy in all its forms, including the supervision of the successful development of the North sea oil and gas sector, the operation of electricity and gas networks with open access and the successful promotion of the efficient use of energy.

British companies have the experience of making successful investments in such an energy market and in providing equipment and services to that market. The charter could give us great opportunities in assisting other countries to liberalise their energy sectors and in creating new opportunities and openings for British companies to invest and export profitably.

Last year at the European Community summit in Dublin, the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr. Lubbers, imaginatively proposed an energy Community to cover energy issues throughout the continent of Europe. The United Kingdom supported that proposal. We saw it and still see it as an opportunity to assist the transition of the countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to market-based economies, particularly in the vital energy

sector, and as an opportunity for further liberalisation throughout Europe. It reflects our policies on free markets and competition at home in the European Community and we are grateful to the Dutch for their idea and the work that they have done in developing it.

After some informal discussion, the European Commission was asked to produce a draft on a possible charter. In February it did so and tonight we are debating its communication to the Council. It is only a first draft of the charter and potential signatories will need to negotiate and agree a mutually acceptable text. We hope that this process might be complete by the end of the year.

The charter would provide an agreed set of principles relating to energy and energy trade. It is envisaged that a series of protocols negotiated individually, and covering specific sectors and issues, would then be attached to the charter. These intergovernmental agreements would provide the framework and the climate of confidence that would allow and encourage the commercial investment from outside the former eastern bloc that the countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union now need to attract. The protocols should also contain the details necessary for freer energy markets within and between the signatories.

We have two main objectives for the charter. First, we wish to assist the Soviet Union and eastern Europe in their transition to multi-based economies. This will help their political reform and will increase their economic efficiency. It will also bring us major benefits, both commercially and in terms of the environment. Secondly, we wish to increase energy liberalisation in the more established democracies, both inside and outside the Community. Freer trade and increased competition would improve both economic and energy efficiency. They would extend consumer choice and enhance security of supply. They would reduce discrimination against our companies when they operate overseas. The charter can provide us with new commercial opportunities by removing some of the existing barriers to trade.

The charter and the associated protocols are likely to cover a number of areas. Oil and gas are likely to be areas of particular interest. The United Kingdom has developed substantial expertise, thanks to our experience in the North sea. We have ensured that it has been explored and developed successfully through sensible licensing and a tax regime that encourages further exploration and investment. We have considerable expertise in the implementation of the necessary safety and environmental regulations, and British companies have shown themselves to be competitive in providing equipment and services in the market that we have established here.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): My hon. Friend has mentioned tax incentives and the environment. Does he accept that one of the greatest sources of new energy is energy conservation? Does the charter take this into account, particularly with regard to rebates for people, companies and Governments throughout the European Community, as well as in eastern and central Europe, that invest in energy conservation?

Mr. Moynihan: The charter does not take it into account, but there are opportunities for protocols to concentrate on energy efficiency schemes. In due course, it might be necessary for this House to consider, possibly in detail, the impact of such protocols. However, at this stage we are considering the broad principles of the charter. It is intended that it will refer to energy efficiency measures and their importance, without going into the very important detail to which my hon. Friend has referred.

The charter gives us the opportunity to pass on our expertise to other countries, and to create new opportunities for British companies. In both gas and electricity, we have created competitive markets in production and supply. We have also shown that security of supply can be maintained, even enhanced, by such competition and by providing third-party access to networks. Such access will be necessary elsewhere if energy trade is to expand throughout Europe, and if co-operation and security are to be increased. Here again, we have been in the forefront. Our companies have the necessary expertise and the charter will give them opportunities to operate outside the United Kingdom.

In renewable energy, too, we have managed to move beyond the theoretical and research stages. The non-fossil-fuel obligation has brought forward new and exciting projects on a commercial and competitive basis. This experience will give the companies here that have developed such projects a firm basis to do so elsewhere. The charter is one way of enhancing their opportunities.

These are only some of the ways in which the charter and liberalised energy markets will help us. Even before we consider the serious problems created by central planning in what was the Eastern bloc, there is wide recognition of the fact that the energy sectors of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe face severe difficulties. They are suffering from inefficiency and lack of investment. In some areas, there is concern over safety. Most visible are the very high levels of pollution caused by energy production, distribution and use. Given the fundamental importance of the performance of the energy sector to those economies, their Governments and those wishing to assist them have correctly identified energy as a priority area for future action. But if investment is to come, enterprises in the west need to be reassured about the economic and legal environment in which they will operate.

The USSR is the world's largest producer of oil and gas and possesses vast undeveloped resources. The oil sector is in as serious a decline as any in the Soviet Union. Some commentators have speculated that, unless there is a real improvement in the efficiency of energy production, refining, distribution and consumption, the Soviet Union could become a net importer of oil well before the the end of the decade. It needs to increase its hard currency export earnings. One way of doing so is to improve energy production, which is one of the few sectors where it has a real chance to earn more from a product that it possesses in great quantities and for which there is a large external market. It must also reduce the burden of inefficient, wasteful consumption.

If we can help energy production in the Soviet Union to become more efficient, we, too, willl gain. Increased exports of Soviet oil and gas wil make world energy markets more competitive in the future and will reduce the diversity of potential sources of supply. Future energy costs should be lower and the security of energy supplies should increase so that the Soviet Union becomes less dependent on supplies from a single region.

The decline in the Soviet economy has many causes —technical, economical and political—but the problems are unlikely to be resolved without western investment and technology. Such investment is likely to be made only when western companies have sufficient assurance that the

[Mr. Moynihan]

risks are not excessive. The proposed charter will help to provide a framework for that and create the necessary climate of confidence.

Many eastern European countries faced severe difficulties this winter due to their dependence on imported energy supplies, especially from the Soviet Union and the Gulf. Freer trade may have helped them to diversify their sources of supply and may have given them greater security. We have played our part recently by amending our oil export guidelines, following their requests, to enable North sea oil to be sold to eastern Europe and elsewhere. Freer trade would also help producers by assuring them that they can find markets for their production without being forced to sell it too cheaply. We hope that free trade in energy would be reinforced by the proposed charter, not only in Europe but throughout the world.

The change to market-based pricing for energy is important throughout Europe. Eastern European countries faced difficulties in obtaining Soviet oil deliveries and, from the beginning of this year they were forced to pay world prices for Soviet energy. Before that, energy prices were well below the world rate and its use was wasteful. One of the best spurs for the efficient use of energy is proper pricing so that consumers can decide how to use it most efficiently.

The structure of energy pricing can be as important as the overall level. In parts of the Soviet Union, energy is provided to households for a fixed payment and there is often no facility for metering it. Naturally, there is little or no incentive for individuals to save energy or to use energy-saving measures such as thermostats. If a room is too hot, the easiest solution is to open a window. In the absence of individual heating controls, that may be the only solution. This may seem tangential to our debate, but it illustrates the significance of proper energy pricing, whether to individual homes or to industry.

The inefficient use of energy in industry is probably more significant. Under a centrally planned economy, heavy users of energy in industry have had little incentive to use energy sensibly. But if energy can be improved, some of the horrific pollution in the east can be avoided. Therefore, the charter seeks greater emphasis on market-based pricing for energy.

Improvements in the energy sector require investment. Capital and expertise are required to overhaul ailing energy economies in the east, but they cannot be found from internal sources alone. Western Governments have provided funds to help economic restructuring and development, including in the energy sector. However, that will not be sufficient. Government bureaucracies are least capable when attempting to discover or produce oil, gas or coal. Most energy is consumed by industry, commerce and individuals.

Ultimately, it will be companies and enterprises and their investment that will provide the capital and skills for new, more efficient, safer and less-polluting energy equipment, both for production and use. That, too, will create new opportunities for British companies. The charter will need to emphasise the vital role of the commercial sector, both in providing investment and taking the necessary action to improve efficiency.

The fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident underlines the fact that the safety issue can cross national borders. The same is true of the environmental impact of the energy sector. All forms of energy production affect the environment in one way or another, and a large number of international initiatives have been undertaken to reduce some of the effects. The Soviet Union and the eastern European countries are parties to a number of those.

The proposed charter should not try to replace or duplicate such arrangements, but, by stimulating investement in modern technology at all stages of the fuel cycle, the charter can assist and make a major contribution to environmental improvement. Some people in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe may be suspicious of the charter, fearing that it could be an attempt by the west to take control of their energy resources, but that is not our aim. Britain has as much interest as anyone in maintaining the principle of national sovereignty over natural resources.

Principles should be stated in the charter. Individual countries should have the right to determine how fast, and in what manner, their own resources are developed. Once the Government have decided that, the opportunity to invest in such development should be open and non-discriminatory. Non-discrimination is another principle which we shall seek in the charter. Companies should be free to invest and provide equipment and services, regardless of which country they originally came from.

Given the expertise and experience in the United Kingdom, the charter will create new opportunities for British companies and increase competition and efficiency wherever it is applied. There is no doubt that the details will need to be negotiated, with some countries looking for joint ventures with local enterprises, while others are prepared to accept 100 per cent. subsidiaries established under local regulations. Whatever the details, the energy sector, both east and west, cannot afford artificial barriers to international co-operation, trade and the transfer of investment and technology.

The problems of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are an important part of the reason why we support the charter, but not the whole reason. Some of the problems that I have identified also apply, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in Europe. We, too, will benefit by showing that our energy sectors operate in a sensible, open and liberal framework. The charter proposal is an important idea, designed both to assist transition in the east in the energy sector and to liberalise energy in the rest of Europe. It will create new opportunities for those moving away from central planning and towards the market. It will also create new opportunities for British companies operating in any part of Europe.

One of the charter's major objectives is to help regenerate the economies of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe through market principles by concentrating on a sector where there is already a substantial international market and where they have scope to make substantial foreign exchange benefits by increasing exports or reducing imports. Another objective is to provide the political security necessary to attract our companies to invest in those countries. The principles are those of an open, liberal and competitive market, and follow the principles that guide our own energy policy. The fruits of success can be enormous in terms of economic prosperity, political stability and environmental improvements.

The United Kingdom has much to offer the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, based on our success in the oil, gas, electricity, nuclear, new and renewable energy and energy efficiency spheres. The charter will create new opportunities for our companies, with their experience in all those sectors. We have been in the forefront of opening up energy markets in the European Community. If successful, the charter will enable us to extend its objectives throughout Europe and beyond. Therefore, I commend the motion and the charter to the House.

10.18 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): We have listened to the Minister for 17 minutes. He will not be surprised that my reading of the charter and my welcome for it are somewhat different from his. He mentioned the words "liberal" or "liberalisation" 14 times, the same number of times as the Secretary of State for Health in his notorious broadcast about the alleged big lie used in the Monmouth by-election. I wondered whether the Minister would carry on in the same vein by coming out with a phrase about "opt-out power stations" not being connected to the national grid.

It is fair to say that anybody reading the document objectively would ask whether it would solve the energy problems of Europe and, if so, which parts of it would make the biggest contribution. I want to return to other themes that have been hitting the headlines in the past few weeks. It is fair to say that politics, as we have learnt over the past few days, is a dirty game. I always remember Montgomery being asked on television in 1956 why he had not followed the well-trodden path of Eisenhower, who had become President of the United States, and gone into politics. He replied that war was a very dirty game, but when compared to politics—and left us to draw our own conclusions. When one compares war or politics to energy, one can say that energy is the dirtiest game of all. By that, I simply mean environmental pollution which is a side-effect of almost all forms of energy.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) asked the Minister whether energy efficiency played a part in the energy charter and the Minister said that it did not really, but that such proposals would be in the protocols. I differ from the Minister in my reading of the document. Energy efficiency is underplayed a bit, but it is included extensively. Point 3 refers to

"optimum use of energy and environmental protection, which will imply:—the development of new and renewable energy sources;—greater energy savings;—measures to combat pollution."

One cannot sum up the problems of energy, as seen by the man or woman in the street, more neatly than that.

Mr. Moynihan: In fairness, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) intervened on a specific group of measures on energy efficiency. The charter overall pays important respects to energy efficiency. Which specific measures are implemented will be matters for negotiation in the protocol. That was the point that I made to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister must not get over-excited about the point. I agree with him to the extent that I believe that energy efficiency should play a larger part in the charter. The Minister described what he thought the charter contained: 99 per cent. opening up of, or liberalisation of, or freeing up of—to use the Minister's buzz words—energy markets on a non-discriminatory, transparent and non-national basis compared with 1 per cent. of other problem-solving measures. That description is wide of the mark. However, I should like there to be even more reference to energy and to the environmental side effects simply because that is what the population of Europe will expect of the charter.

If we asked the population of Europe what the No. 1 problem was, they would not say that it was the inability of Austrian investors to get shares in the Portuguese electricity industry without an assurance about being able to have their dividends remitted in hard currencies. People would say that that was rubbish and had nothing to do with the matter. They would say that they wanted to be reasonably sure that there was not a second Chernobyl, ready to pop off at any minute, hiding in eastern Europe or that brown coal or lignite production would not cause acidification and kill forests in Germany, Scotland or Wales when the east wind blew. Such environmental problems are of concern, combined with the possibility of far higher electricity prices if we introduce a carbon tax. Such a tax may prevent Bangladesh again being completely flooded as the oceans rise—if global warming is a reality rather than just a scientific theory, as it is now. Those are the big energy talking points. The European energy charter points towards them, but it should point towards them with a little more emphasis.

The Minister's premature triumphalism about the United Kingdom recipe for the development of energy is completely misplaced. Neither in Britain nor elsewhere in Europe is there a real solution to the problem of what energy gives us in a combination of naturally competitive activities such as oil refineries and natural monopolies such as local distribution networks or long-distance transmission networks. What do we do with natural monopolies? Do we keep, say, local wire networks under public control or municipal control, or do we pass the monopolies over to the private sector—for example, the oil refining industry or electricity generating companies, which we could call naturally competitive? To achieve maximum energy efficiency gains, we could say that they should be integrated with the natural monopolies on the wires side of the business. Those are the big questions for people in the energy industry in the next 10 years.

The charter does not examine those questions in as much detail as it should. The Minister's interpretation does not examine them at all. Those are big issues, given the natural tendency of the treaty of Rome or a Euratom-based body such as the European Commission to look at Europe simply as a device for the removal of trade barriers. The treaty of Rome also provides for the 12 countries of the European Community to come together on an ad hoc basis—this matter is outside the treaty of Rome, although we can see it colouring the treaty—with the major leap into the east, which we must welcome. As the Minister rightly said, the pollution problems of energy production recognise no national boundaries and no European Community boundaries. In that leap to the east, can the 12 countries of Europe plus the others in the east come together constructively to solve the real problems of the future of energy production?

I am disappointed that the document does not mention global warming. China and India will need to be included. In the document there is the slightest tangential reference to third world countries. That is important. There is a brief

[Mr. Morgan]

reference to clean coal technology. If we manage to perfect clean coal technology and if clean coal technology is one solution to the problem of global warming through, for example, the pressurised fluidised bed combustion system, the passing of that new clean coal technology to China and India may be the biggest single contribution to the solution of the global warming problem over the next 25 years. The combined technological and financial resources of the 12 countries of the Community can contribute to solving the planet's No. 1 environmental problem. That is an important item. The relationship with the third world is mentioned tangentially. It is a big issue. It is played down a little, and we want it to be played up again when the document is transformed into protocols.

Another problem that needs a higher profile is energy efficiency. The document states that we need some organisation to disseminate technology, new techniques and new methods of promoting energy efficiency. We are on all fours on that point. If bright ideas are evolved in other countries, we want them to be transmitted here. The tone of the Minister's remark was somewhat Kiplingesque. It assumed that the flow of new ideas and technology was almost by right from this country to other countries and was not two way. That smacks of a British-centred view of the world. For instance, we would hope for an inward flow of technology from other sources in respect of more energy-efficient use of combined heat and power, coal generation and the incineration of municipal refuse. In the past months, German municipal electricity utilities, in combination with their linked parent generating companies, have approved substantial new CHP schemes in certain cities in Germany. We are terribly slow. Apart from the construction of the Slough power station, we have no projects in combined heat and power. We would welcome some inward flow of technology.

Municipal refuse incineration for electricity generating purposes is another area where we are slow to develop. A municipal incineration plant has been approved in Munich. We would like to think that that will prove that such plants can succeed, even in an environmentally fussy country such as Germany. If so, such plants will become acceptable in Britain. That is a matter in which we expect an inward flow of technology.

We are pleased that the new Franco-British consortium of one of the subsidiaries of GEC and its French partner Alsthom is combining all its resources to design and manufacture turbine generators. The consortium intends to invest in Grimethorpe. That is one of the sadly neglected areas of clean coal technology which came close to marketabilty but has been left to wither. Fortunately, the Anglo-French consortium has announced that it will put a couple of million pounds towards the project.

We hope that if it is proved that the Grimethorpe project can operate at a fully marketable size the technology will flow outwards from Britain to China, India, the Soviet Union, and so on. However, the flow of technology is not all one way. The Minister made a big mistake in presenting it as such and implying that we were taking on the white man's burden and assisting the poor old Soviet Union to sort out its energy problems, vast as those problems are. There may well be things that we could learn from other countries and it pays occasionally to be a little modest so that we draw from both sides as well as grasp the commercial opportunities that we hope will come from developments such as those at Grimethorpe.

The charter is not all about liberalisation. It is about energy efficiency and transfer of technology both ways. It is not all about teaching the poor, state-controlled, centrally planned economies how to gain the benefits of liberalisation. There are real energy problems. Privatisation is not the sole policy or the sole aim of policy when dealing with issues such as acid rain and seeking to introduce combined heat and power to double fuel efficiency from the typical mid to high 30 per cent. to the 70 per cent. fuel efficiency conversion ratios that we should look for by the beginning of the new millennium, in nine years.

Clean coal, more suitable uses for municipal refuse than disposal in landfill sites and other matters are also mentioned in the charter. However, the charter is biased towards liberalisation. It does not treat energy efficiency as a sufficiently high priority. We do not agree with the Minister's interpretation that the charter is 99 per cent. about liberalisation. We see it as a proper subject involving walking the tightrope of the obsession of the treaty of Rome and removing trade barriers. The treaty of Rome is all about establishing level playing fields for competition. That is fair enough in activities where competition is the natural way of allocating resources in the best possible way. In other activities there are natural monopolies and resource efficiency is paramount. Energy is inherently a dirty form of economic activity. The profile of energy efficiency and other issues must be raised in the charter. From the Minister's speech it seems that there is not much chance that that will be done.

10.33 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): For many years of my life, I have made a non-self-interested case for fair votes and proportional representation. Tonight I have been persuaded to make a much more self-interested case. Under a fair system, my party would have its due 150 Members, and one person could have spoken in the London Underground debate at 7 o'clock, another person would have spoken in the environmental assessment debate, and someone else would have spoken on the European energy charter. Under the present regime, one person has to speak in all three debates. I apologise to the House. I am equally sad because it is getting near to bed time, and well past supper time, and I have not yet had a chance to eat. As a result, I shall have to miss the Adjournment debate of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), but I may say in advance that I imagine I shall support what she has to say about safety on London buses.

The proposal by the Dutch Government some months ago for a Europe-wide energy charter begins the second phase of the development of Europe from the same starting point as that with which the post-war development of Europe began. The founding fathers of the European Community decided that the best building block on which to construct a Community was a joint energy policy.

The mechanism used was the European Coal and Steel Community. They believed that pooling the resources of coal and steel would prevent warfare. They placed under one organisation's control the two prerequisites for arms

and defence manufacture. They saw a common coal and steel policy, for France and Germany particularly, as the way to peace. Eventually, of course, those two countries were joined by four and eventually by 10 others. Thus, it is interesting that this, the proposed first pan-European energy policy, is being used as the first building block for what might eventually be a Community stretching throughout the countries of Europe, with responsibility for many matters apart from energy.

I am an ardent supporter of the European Community. In general, I support its economic propositions, although certain difficulties are associated with them. I welcome this debate because it allows us, in a multi-party fashion, to assist the Government's response to the proposals for an energy charter. We should support the idea of such a charter; but I, like the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), take the view that some of the ideas on which it is based go off in the wrong direction.

Title 1 of the objectives listed on page 9—after the inevitable preamble—reads as follows:

"With a view to improving security of supply on the most satisfactory economic basis and developing energy activities with due regard for the environment, the signatories agree to promote the construction of a large European energy market."

I would not agree with that as a first objective. It is right to accept that there is a large European energy market, but not as a first objective. That should concern securing the best possible energy use by reducing and sharing energy, not just by developing more sources of supply.

My three guiding principles would be somewhat different. The foundation of a sustainable European energy charter should begin with the careful conservation of all the energy resources of the continent. We should reduce total consumption and change the balance of our primary sources of supply. Secondly, we should use the proposed market to provide the most efficient allocation mechanism as between Community countries. Thirdly, we must develop renewable resources more.

Very recently, I learned through a parliamentary answer that Britain's energy consumption rose by 0·7 per cent. last year over the year before, while GDP fell by 0·5 per cent. That, I believe, is the first time that consumption has ever risen while GDP has fallen, and that statistic mirrors the steady decline of the United Kingdom's energy ratio. One of the criticisms levelled by many at the Government is that we do not have a proper national energy strategy. It is wonderful to have a European energy charter, but it would be quite a good idea to have a national energy strategy as well.

The draft charter for Europe allows us to review our energy policy at home. I hope that one of the consequences will be a review of our energy requirements, our supply capacity and our scope for reducing energy consumption. Perhaps we can carry out such a review in the context of the continent of Europe as a whole. Energy saving requires not just targets but tax incentives, grants and penalties that will inhibit high-energy-consuming practices. We need local and national levels of energy consumption that will lead to a reduction. That can be done by setting maximum targets and trying to stay below them.

All that must be done on the level playing field that we hear so much about, and we must make sure that there are no artificial barriers. A European initiative on cross-boundary funding of conservation projects could emerge from the charter and a review. We could pool our cash resources and our expertise and ensure fair treatment in the search for conservation.

Common labelling of household goods would ensure that people recognised energy-efficient white goods. The white goods consumer revolution would become a green goods revolution. People would reduce their use of energy-demanding washing machines and dishwashers, and would have a firm base on which to choose the best sort of machinery to have in the home.

We could make sure that Britain and the continent made more use of energy-efficient light bulbs and a whole range of other consumer products. The European experience can educate Britain and the whole of Europe. I endorse the Minister's view about the potential of eastern Europe for making a contribution to saving energy. We need a common strategy to deal with the adverse environmental consequences.

On a visit to Cracow in southern Poland, I saw the result on that beautiful mediaeval city of pollution from the nearby smelting works. Some countries in eastern Europe have used energy in an unsound way and have caused enormous pollution. A common environmental objective could benefit eastern Europe.

Conservation strategy has enormous potential for creating jobs. The Association for the Conservation of Energy has given the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy properly calculated projections which show that 155,000 jobs could be created in Britain in energy conservation technology and activity. Parliamentary answers show that, over the next decade, we have a potential market of about £50 billion-worth of energy efficiency technology. Across Europe, about £250 billion is likely to be spent on energy abatement technology. There are massive opportunities for job creation and energy reduction. Energy conservation should be central to the charter.

Next, let us be bold about using the market and adopt the proposal for Community levels for emission ceilings and licences. Targets could be set in Europe and pilot programmes started for international initiatives. Licences could be issued to producer countries to keep within the targets. That is one way to lessen the greenhouse effect.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West accepted, and I have heard Ministers say that they accept, that we must be realistic about energy charges. The proposal in the Community for a carbon or energy tax is gathering momentum, and I and my colleages support it. We grossly underpay for the energy that we consume. My party believes that we should pay much more for the non-renewable sources of energy that we, both in this country and across our continent, consume every day. It would be a good idea to have that strategy built into a European energy charter. By all means let us have the real market, but we should use it to make sure that the real costs of energy are paid for by the citizens of this wealthy part of the world.

Thirdly, we must also develop renewables, and state that much more authoritatively as an objective within the charter. I am surprised that this is so much ignored in the charter, because the Dutch are good about renewable energy—windmills are the symbol of the Netherlands, and are practical ways to produce energy as well. Last year, only 0·01 per cent. of Government expenditure went on developing renewable energy sources. Germany, Greece, Holland, Sweden and Switzerland spent double that.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

The charter gives us an opportunity to rectify the oversights of recent years in terms of the fossil fuel levy. I know that the Government are thinking about it. At Energy questions last week, I heard the replies to my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) about what is happening in Scotland. We could review the lifetime of the fossil fuel levy of eight years. We could change the proposal—the Government's proposal—put it in the context of Europe, and make sure that we have a far better ratio for payback, to enhance renewable energy, both here and in Europe.

This take-note debate is an opportunity for the Government to take advice, to go back and negotiate. I hope that they will negotiate for a tough energy charter, not just one that acknowledges that environmental policy depends on good energy policy, but one that does much more to ensure that the energy charter is a European environmental charter as well.

10.46 pm

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was right—this is an opportunity for Ministers to listen to the views put forward by hon. Members, to take note of them and to use them in discussions on the development of the charter. The hon. Member misinterpreted the emphasis that I placed on the protection of the environment, which is one of the major points that has been made this evening. I can give him the firm undertaking that environmental considerations will be given full weight in the charter. That is vital, and I touched on some of the ways that the environment will be affected by the charter. Modernisation of gas transmission and distribution networks would, for example, reduce the levels of leaks of methane, which is not only dangerous locally but is a significant contributor to the greenhouse effect. I have heard the hon. Gentleman make that point before.

The building in eastern Europe of new power stations with modern equipment can reduce sulphur dioxide emissions, which result from the burning of lignite, or brown coal. This will reduce the impact of acid rain locally and regionally. Greater efficiency in the conversion and use of all forms of energy will help to stabilise carbon dioxide production, which affects the global environment. All these features can benefit from an effective charter and it is vital that emphasis is rightly placed, and continues to be placed by those working on the charter, on the environment, energy efficiency and safety improvements in the energy sector.

I take the points made both by the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). I understand that their comments were not a criticism of the Government's position, but were reflections on what should be given greater priority in the drafting and the objectives of the title, which was read out by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. As he rightly pointed out, the first of the three major objectives is primarily concerned with the free market in energy and the expansion of trade in energy. I concentrated in some detail —I hope to the benefit of the House—on how we interpreted that.

The second of the objectives is co-operation and co-ordination in energy. That has considerable impact on the technical aspects and economic data. I agree that this is not all one way. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey gave that impression. We can benefit a great deal from the charter, and from the expertise of, and technological developments in, other countries, not least on renewables.

I have been one of the greatest advocates of the non-fossil fuel obligation and have been much involved in pushing it forward. I attach the greatest importance to renewable sources of energy in terms of both diversity and security of supply. The environmental impact of renewable sources of energy is one of my major priorities.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West talked about incineration and the effect of the German projects. With my Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens)—as always, my hon. Friend is sitting quietly behind me—I shall visit Edmonton to see the incinerator projects there, which have important benefits for north London. Only recently I went to Brent to see the Chalk Hill project. The waste from the estate is used to generate heat. The entire heating system is fuelled by the waste that is generated by the residents. We must examine more projects of that sort. Exchange of information within the charter will present us with an opportunity to move forward.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister envisage acceptance of a carbon tax? Does he envisage that within the United Kingdom we shall gradually extend the nuclear levy, which is in effect a carbon tax, so that there is an extension of municipal waste incineration and so forth? If so, does he agree with the policy of the Liberal Democrats, which we do not?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman knows the Government's position on a carbon tax. I do not agree with the argument that it should be extended across the board. I recognise that if the United Kingdom is to meet the high standards that are required for the environment —standards are becoming increasingly high—while taking account of production, we must take the opportunities that the charter presents for setting high environmental standards, which will be reflected in the charges that are passed on to the consumer. That is an essential prerequisite to achieving higher environmental standards throughout Europe. Any country that is a signatory to the charter will not be prevented from setting higher standards. I hope that we shall achieve—this is one of the objectives set out in one of the protocols—high environmental standards. As I have said, those standards will have to be paid for, and the cost will have to be passed on to the consumer, who demands them and recognises their importance if we are to secure an enhanced environmental quality of life.

I take on board the importance that has been attached to conservation and to renewables. We shall consider these matters carefully when presenting our case for further detailed discussion.

Finally, I recognise the importance that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West has attached to safety improvements, clean coal technology, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, which are covered by the third part of the title. I accept that the priority is not as high as hon. Members would like, and we shall bear that

much in mind when it comes to moving forward with what I believe is a welcome and important initiative in the energy sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4936/91 on a European Energy Charter; and welcomes proposals for a Charter designed to promote an open, liberal and non-discriminatory energy market throughout Europe and to assist in restructuring the energy sectors of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union on a market basis.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With the leave of the House, I shall put together motions Nos. 3 to 7 on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

Licences and licensing

That the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

Financial services

That the Financial Services act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1104), dated 30th April 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

That the draft Financial Services Act 1986 (Delegation) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

Employment codes of practice

That the draft Employment Codes of Practice (Revocation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

Northern Ireland

That the draft Fisheries (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April be approved.—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Question agreed to.

European Community Documents

Madam Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together motions Nos. 8 and 9 on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees).

Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8597/90 + COR 1 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 26th February on unfair terms in consumer contracts; and endorses the Government's view that the measure needs to address identified problems with consumer contracts and to strike a fair balance between the interests of consumers and those of traders.

Milk Quotas

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5491/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 10th May on the amendment of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 857/84 in respect of allocation of milk quotas; and supports the Government's intention to seek an agreement which meets the requirements of the European Court's judgments on the treatment to be accorded for quota purposes to former participants in certain Community dairying cessation schemes and ensures that the effectiveness of milk quotas in limiting Community expenditure on market support in the dairy sector is maintained—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Question agreed to.

London Buses

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

10.53 pm

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am pleased to have the opportunity in a short debate to raise some important issues about buses in London. It is interesting that, all over the world, in almost any country, one of the most regularly used symbols of London is the London bus. Yet in this country the bus is sometimes considered the poor relation in public transport. There is no doubt that it has suffered from a lack of status in the eyes of many prospective users.

It is important to remind ourselves of the benefits that the bus brings to public transport in a major city such as London. Buses are extremely efficient users of road space. In peak periods, they carry in central London nearly one third of road passengers but account for only 1 per cent. of road vehicles. They carry 1 per cent. of road users in the whole of London on only 0·2 per cent. of vehicles. Nevertheless, buses receive less attention than almost any other form of transport. Certainly they have not been the subject of many debates in the House.

Because bus services do not require major new infrastructure, they are seldom the subject of lead news items. London buses carry 4 million passengers a day—about the same as Network SouthEast and London Underground combined. They make far more efficient use of available road space than do private cars, and consume significantly less energy per passenger mile.

Encouraging greater use of existing capacity within the existing bus network, and enhancing it where required, would make it possible, at relatively low cost, to reduce pollution, lower the number of accidents, and make more road space available for other potential users. In the case of journeys that cannot be made by foot or by bicycle, the bus is the environmentally friendly option.

In the short term, no other policy is likely to bring such immediate and cost-effective results in increasing the total capacity of London's public transport system. The London Regional Passenger Committee policy document, "About Turn", comments that London's bus network is "a grossly under-utilised asset"—and that is borne out by the facts.

At present, there are 300,000 empty seats on London buses each rush-hour morning. One bus is the equivalent of 70 cars. If only we could entice those drivers off the road and on to those vacant seats, significant space would be created for the essential vehicles that are so necessary for London's economic well-being.

There are many reasons why the public are discouraged from using buses. I will not repeat the arguments relating to reliability or to the high fares—although we are continually reminded that London's public transport system has the highest fares in Europe. Instead, I will concentrate on the safety and security of both passengers and staff.

A few week ago, London Buses announced that there were almost 1,000 assaults on bus staff last year, and acknowledged that the figure has been climbing steadily for three years, with a 20 per cent. rise in the past two years. There were 524 attacks on driver-operators, 284 on conductors, 49 on drivers, 105 on officials, and four on other personnel.

The consequence of those attacks—apart from the obvious trauma suffered by the victims—has been a warning by some operators that they may have to withdraw evening services on certain routes. It is surely time that operators installed video cameras on all their vehicles. The effect will not be immediate, but once footage is obtained of assaults and acts of vandalism, it will be easier to achieve successful prosecutions. By co-operating with the media, the operators will be able to publicise mindless crimes and the subsequent successful convictions.

We do not know the number of assaults on passengers, or the number of times that buses have to stop because of an incident between passengers, because no separate statistics on them are kept—they are simply merged with the other London crime figures. I ask the Minister to find a way of separating those statistics, because the information available is not good enough.

What would help to make travellers more secure? At this stage, I pay tribute to Lambeth public transport group, and particularly to John Stewart and George Wright, who produced an extremely good document entitled "Caught Out: the Value of Video Cameras on Buses"—a copy of which the Minister, if he is well prepared, will have seen. Many of my remarks stem from the work done by John Stewart and George Wright.

When considering the need for video cameras, it is important to show where their use has been successful. West Midlands Travel began a campaign against crime on its buses way back in 1987. The vandalism bill at the time was £2·3 million per annum. It is currently £250,000 per year and continues to decline. That has been achieved directly as a result of the installation of video cameras on almost all of its buses, and of increased co-operation with the police and local magistrates. As a result the incidence of graffiti and slashed seats has been reduced by more than three quarters. The filmed evidence of culprits allows West Midlands Travel to take steps to recover the cost of repairing the damage or to prosecute. If necessary, evidence from video cameras can also be used to secure compensation. As prosecutions have increased, so the crimes have declined.

Video cameras cost a great deal of money. There have been varying estimates of how much it would cost per vehicle, and there is no doubt that installation throughout an entire fleet, as would be the case in London, is not cheap. However, it will save money in the longer term. As the West Midlands Travel managing director, Don Colston said:

"We have put millions in, but much of it has been self-financing."

More importantly, West Midlands Travel told the Lambeth public transport group:

"There is no doubt that our staff and customers appreciate the added security that the cameras provide. They have increased passenger confidence in the travelling environment on our buses."

Evidence shows that what has happened in the west midlands could happen in London, with the same effect. The installation of video cameras not only saves money in the long term: it also makes the buses a safer and more attractive mode of travel, which is good for everybody.

The principal operator in London is London Buses, which has a fleet of just over 5,000 vehicles. It has estimated that it would cost £20 million to fit video cameras to all its buses. The Lambeth public transport group and other evidence shows that it could be done for

much less. London Buses has fitted some cameras to its vehicles, but it has said that, no matter how desirable, it does not have enough money to equip the entire fleet.

The cost-benefit analysis, even under my calculations, shows that it would actually save money in the long term. In 1989, London Buses spent £2 million repairing buses which had been vandalised or covered in graffiti. That is a very large sum of money, but the hidden cost increased that amount further. The £2 million bill does not take into account the loss of revenue when buses are taken out of service for cleaning or repair. Nor does it include the substantial loss of revenue and the way in which passengers are profoundly affected when crews take their buses off the road to express sympathy after a colleague is assaulted.

Video cameras could also be used as effective revenue protection, ensuring that people have paid their fares and stopping fare evasion, and could assist in the sort of survey work on which London Buses and London Transport spend enormous sums of money every now and again to try to work out travel information. The video camera could be monitoring passengers who board, gathering useful information on travel patterns—how many people pay cash and who pays cash, for example. It would end up doing a job that we pay consultants large amounts of money to do.

There are no figures to show how many people do not use the bus because they feel that it is unsafe. However, there is no doubt—it is widely acknowledged—that a substantial number of people, especially women and the elderly, feel isolated and insecure when they are upstairs on a one-person operated bus. My Mini was recently stolen and for about five or six weeks I regularly used London buses. I felt very insecure sitting on the top of a bus going home from this place, especially at this hour of night. Passengers find graffiti and torn bus seats threatening. That is a further reason why many women choose not to use the bus.

The deterrent effect of video cameras would reduce attacks. It would make working on buses more attractive and might help to ease the difficulties of recruiting staff. In addition, it would reduce the number of days that bus crews take off work as a result of assaults.

Many other aspects of London buses could be improved. The Department of Transport's consultative document, "A Bus Strategy for London", accepts almost everything that bus users say about the bus. It says that buses are used most by people who do not have access to cars, by people on low incomes, more by women than by men and more by 11 to 19-year-olds and people over 60. For many of those people, there is no alternative, yet the document says that the future of buses depends on their ability to win and retain passengers in competition with other transport options.

The only solution offered by the Government is the deregulation of buses in London. I do not want to go into the details of that argument, as I do not have time, but I hope that the Minister will realise that deregulation is not the way to improve bus services in London. It would lead to more congestion and poorer reliability, but would not lead to more people using buses.

This year alone, London Buses has been asked by London Transport to lose £3 million Londonwide—not because the buses are not being used but because that is its share of the amount that London Transport must lose. That has led to fewer services in the evenings, which has affected people who have no alternative but to use the bus, such as shift workers and people who must travel to work early in the morning. In my area, the No. 159 has been cut drastically.

I should like the Government to take transport in London, especially buses, much more seriously. They have said what needs to be done and how essential the bus is but their only solution is deregulation. Several measures would make people feel that the bus is a better option. We must modernise its image. Many people regard buses as old-fashioned, smoky and dirty, even though smoking is not allowed. It need not be so, and London Buses has new vehicles.

Seats must be made more comfortable, good colour coding must be introduced, and the number on the front of a bus must be the same as the number on the back, so that people are not confused. However, operators would need access to capital to provide vehicles to match that image and to entice the customer. We could lower fares, increase reliability, speed up bus-priority measures and restore some conductors. I am not saying that every bus should have a conductor, but a case can be made for the wholesale return of bus conductors on certain routes.

Some of the organisations most interested in public transport have got together and called this the "Year of the Bus". The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has been promoting the bus. The Bus and Coach Council has launched its "Buses Mean Business" campaign. The Association of London Authorities has produced a report entitled "Room at the Top". The London Boroughs Association has produced "Scope for Bus Priorities in London" and has argued for more frequent services.

Much more could be done, with some effort and imagination. Only a properly funded public transport service in London can get London moving. If we want to establish such a service quickly, we should get our buses moving. In order to attract people back to the buses and to make them feel safe, we should come up with a little additional money. We should put video cameras on all our buses, which would make people feel safer and would save money in the long run.

11.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) for raising the matter of public transport safety, which is of great importance to the Government. I agree with much of the hon. Lady's speech, but we have some differences on deregulation. She is aware that the Government are consulting on that matter. We have had a number of responses and we are now considering the likely course of progress. It would be inappropriate to refer to the matter further.

In those areas where bus deregulation has occurred, however, it has led to new customer services. In some areas buses are now serving districts that previously had no bus service. I accept, however, that London is in a different category from the other examples of deregulation, but I cannot allow the hon. Lady to dismiss the argument for deregulation.

Public transport safety is of great importance. The hon. Lady is right about the vast numbers of people who rely on public transport as their means of getting to and from work, particularly in the capital. The hon. Lady cited

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

impressive figures on passengers. Whether one's journey is for work or leisure, a visit to friends or relations, or whether one is a resident or a visitor, public transport is the safe way to travel in and around London. Last week, Denis Tunnicliffe, the managing director of London Underground, said:

"You are safer on the Tube than you are in your kitchen."

It is important that we take every opportunity to convince people just how safe public transport is and how important it is to the capital.

Safety on London Transport is a top priority. In the wake of the Fennell report into the 1987 fire at King's Cross, LT implemented a major programme of expenditure and training to enhance safety matters that affect passengers, members of the public and staff.

London Transport has a comprehensive set of safety objectives that have been set by its board and endorsed by the Government. The board's safety audit committee monitors the safety of operations across all the subsidiary companies.

In road safety terms, bus travel scores high. In 1989 passenger and driver casualties accounted for less than 4 per cent. of casualties to all vehicle users while accounting for about 7 per cent. of passenger kilometres. When buses are involved in an accident, passengers and drivers also fare better in comparison to the occupants of other vehicles. Perhaps that is not something which we should like to shout about, but it is a fact.

London Buses recently demonstrated a new safety device that it intends to fit to the centre doors of nearly 3,000 buses. The new device will make the doors reopen automatically if they meet an obstruction. It is intended to prevent the small number of accidents that have occurred when passengers, mainly elderly, have been caught in the doors. I am aware that some people still prefer to use the old Routemaster buses with their open platform entry, but buses with doors are much safer. The chances of a passenger having a serious accident getting on or off a bus are roughly 11 times greater on an open-platform bus. The new safety device will mean that buses with doors will be safer still. We are all aware that, sometimes, devices that have been introduced for safety reasons are not wholly welcomed by the travelling public.

It is important to realise that a bus passenger's fear of assault, in common with the fear of the passenger on any form of public transport, is greater than the reality. Compared to 1989, crimes of violence on the underground are down by more than 23 per cent. Assaults on passengers have been reduced by almost 19 per cent. Although the figures for assaults on bus passengers are not readily available from the Metropolitan police—I accept the hon. Lady's concern about that and I shall follow up the issue to see whether more work is required—London Buses believes that many passengers find bus travel far safer than the street environment in which they live and work.

London Buses Ltd.—LBL—liaises closely with the Metropolitan police. Policemen and policewomen are allowed free travel on buses, both on and off duty. Where there are particular trouble spots, arrangements are made with the police to mount special surveillance exercises in order to catch the culprits.

We cannot and will not be complacent. One assault is one too many and we must address people's fears and apprehensions just as seriously as actual dangers to their safety. However, it is true that the vast majority of those using buses and trains do so in complete safety as the risk of attack remains very low.

As one example of our commitment to safety and security on public transport, the Government recently published—in conjunction with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, transport operators and the transport police—a booklet entitled "Travel Safely on Public Transport", which gives practical advice to passengers on how to make their journeys safer. The production of the booklet was funded by the Department of Transport, which also took on the responsibility of distributing it.

LBL is concerned with the safety of its bus crews, as well as its passengers. As the hon. Lady said, some attacks on crews are despicable in the extreme. Indeed, assaults on bus crews are much more prevalent than assaults on passengers. It is unacceptable that men and women should be subjected to the risk of attack simply through doing their job, and I fully support the measures that LBL is taking to reduce that risk. I know that all hon. Members would support the management in that.

I am aware of the report produced by the Lambeth public transport group, which advocates the fitting of video cameras to vehicles operated by London Buses Ltd. The document makes some strong points, but it does not tell the whole story. It ignores some of the important steps that LBL has already taken to reduce the number of assaults. All LBL buses are now fitted with two-way radios and protective screens for the drivers. They also have an assault klaxon which starts a horn and sets the vehicle's direction indicators flashing. Those measures are of benefit for bus crews and passengers alike.

The Department of Transport has set up a standing panel on assaults on bus staff, which brings together representatives of the bus and taxi industry, the unions, the police and other Government Departments. The panel looks at violence affecting bus crews and taxi drivers, and also studies vandalism and graffiti. It provides a valuable forum for interested parties to exchange views and information about ways of protecting staff and passengers.

The Lambeth public transport group report argues that the installation of video cameras on buses owned by West Midlands Travel reduced vandalism by 75 per cent. That is welcome. However, the report offers no hard evidence of a reduction in assaults on passengers or staff. The scheme may well have followed from an experiment at the Mander centre in Wolverhampton, of which I know from my local experience. Indeed, you too, Madam Deputy Speaker, may well know of the experiment. When it was announced, it did not meet with universal approval, but its implementation has gone down exceptionally well. It has to be remembered that sometimes these projects are not welcomed by everyone.

I accept that the installation of video cameras can be a deterrent to vandalism and assault. Indeed, LBL itself recognises the benefits and has started on a programme to fit video cameras progressively to all its vehicles. But video cameras are not a panacea. It is a sad irony that one of the two assaults that the Lambeth public transport group describes in its report happened on a bus that had a video camera fitted. In that case, unfortunately, the presence of a video camera was no deterrent. In the other case, video evidence may well have helped the police, but because——

Ms. Hoey: My point is that, because the media have not given enough attention to the fact that there are video

cameras on some buses, people are not aware that they are installed. The more publicity given to that fact, and the more buses that contain video cameras, the more likely people are to be deterred.

Mr. McLoughlin: I wholly accept the hon. Lady's point. I hope that tonight's Adjournment debate and some of the publicity that the hon. Lady received today in the *Evening Standard* will go some way to highlighting the fact that there are already cameras on some buses, and that they will spread to more of them.

The video evidence may well have helped the police, but, because of the technical limitations of the video system currently available, there is no guarantee that the videotaped evidence would secure a conviction. However, I accept that we must deliver the message about the many steps being taken by LBL to try to improve security, make a safer environment and make the passenger feel safe—an important underlying factor.

The cost of installing video cameras on all LBL's buses would be about £20 million. I know that there is some dispute about the cost, but I have been given a figure of about £20 million. That is the approximate cost of 200 new buses.

I hope that the hon. Lady will appreciate that that is a considerable sum. LBL has many competing calls on its resources. It is for it to decide how best to allocate those resources. LBL is committed to increasing the number of video cameras installed on its buses. The decision on the rate at which cameras are installed on the bus fleet must be a matter for the company.

The Government grant to London Transport will be about £2·5 billion over the next three years. That is more than double the figure in real terms compared with the previous three years, so there need be no financial pressure on bus safety. As in other sectors, it is for London Transport to decide what its priorities are and to act accordingly.

I have every confidence in London Transport and its commitment to ensuring safe working conditions for its staff and a safe, secure and pleasant travelling environment for its passengers. That is in everybody's interests—of the bus operators and the bus users. I hope that, by securing this Adjournment debate, the hon. Lady will have moved one small step along the road of highlighting both how safe our buses are and the measures taken by management, with Government co-operation and agreement, to make the buses a safer form of public transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (HARBOURS) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Class Sizes

1. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average class size in the years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): In 1989-90 there were on average 26·4 pupils per class in maintained primary schools and 20·7 pupils per class in maintained secondary schools in England. Information on class sizes in 1990-91 is not yet available.

Mr. Battle: Is not it clear that despite a drop in pupil numbers, class sizes rose last year for the first time for 20 years? Does not that show that there has been a cut in resources and that primary and nursery schools in particular are under pressure as a result of the Government's policies?

Mr. Fallon: The pupil-teacher ratio to which the hon. Gentleman refers is not linked directly to class size, which depends as much on how staff members are deployed as on how many there are. The ratio has fallen from 19:1 in the late 1970s to about 17:1 today.

Mr. Pawsey: Can my hon. Friend strike a comparison between teacher numbers in 1979—the last year of the Labour Government—and teacher numbers in 1989? Will he confirm that education spending this year is 16 per cent. higher than that for the preceding year? Does he agree that much of the additional funding is being spent on teachers?

Mr. Fallon: As always, my hon. Friend is well informed on these matters. I am sure that he would like to know that the teacher vacancy rate, at 1·6 per cent., is the lowest of almost any profession. Vacancies have fallen significantly in the past year and last year we had the most applications for teacher training since 1977.

Mr. Fatchett: Is not the Minister confused yet again? According to *The Times Educational Supplement* of 3 May, a spokesman for the Department said that the figures that had been published by the Department for 1990-91 seemed to show an increase in the pupil-teacher ratio, but the Minister has denied those figures. In fact, he said that they were not available. When will he tell the truth to the House and when will he accept that there has been a deterioration in the pupil-teacher ratio because of the Government's inadequate funding policy?

Mr. Fallon: I explained in my main answer that information on class sizes is not available. I was trying to explain to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) that class size is not the same as the pupil-teacher ratio. Class size depends just as much on how staff members are deployed as on how many staff there are. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, of all people, would understand the difference.

Mr. Batiste: Is not it clear that if schools opt for grant-maintained status they will be able to liberate from local authorities a great deal of money that could be made available, at least in part, for recruiting teachers and reducing class sizes? In Leeds, for example, comprehensive schools could liberate between £250,000 and £500,000 a year. That would buy many extra teachers.

Mr. Fallon: There is much that local education authorities can do to reduce central bureaucracy and the numbers of administrators and advisers to get more resources down to the classroom level. A central feature of local management of schools is that we are driving resources through the council hall direct to the classrooms, where they are needed.

Nursery Education

2. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that high-quality nursery education is available for children throughout the country; and if he will make a statement.

6. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with local education authorities about increasing the number of nursery places available.

11. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that high-quality nursery education is available for children throughout the country; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): It is for local authorities to determine the extent and form of provision for the under-fives in their areas.

Mr. Lofthouse: As the Carlton club seminar suggested a lack of Government policy towards nursery education, what is the Secretary of State doing to encourage Tory-controlled local authorities which are not spending their allocation on under-five and nursery education?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, there has been a considerable increase in the number of under-fives attending nursery schools and in nursery provision. Indeed, 150,000 more youngsters attend now than did in 1979.

Mrs. Heal: Does the Minister agree with the findings of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts which reinforced the belief in the importance of nursery

education to assist children in their education and socialisation? Will he ensure that there is a nursery place for every three and four-year-old child who needs and chooses to have one?

Mr. Eggar: I have already said that there has been a significant increase in the numbers attending. We have also made available an extra £150 million to local authorities next year, over and above what was available last year. I suggest that the hon. Lady has a word with her Front-Bench spokesman on public expenditure, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who, when she held my position, could not find the resources for nursery education for all three and four-year-olds. I notice that she has refused to do so on behalf of the Labour party.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does the Minister accept that, having seen at first hand with one of my children the enormous benefits of nursery education, it seems to me shortsighted for the Government to abandon any form of national strategy in this area of educational provision? Although the Government may be concentrating on education post-16, is not it true that the quality of children's earliest experiences of education has an important bearing on their ability to make good use of the later opportunities that they get in life?

Mr. Eggar: It is a rather distressing fact that the local education authorities that have large numbers of nursery places available also have some of the worst GCSE results and the worst staying-on rates in the country.

Mr. Tracey: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the London borough of Wandsworth a nursery place is provided for every child between the age of three and five who requires it? Should not that example be copied by a few Labour local education authorities?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend and I suggest that Wandsworth offers help to Labour LEAs to show them how it can be done.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend elaborate on what he said a moment ago? Was not it the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) who confirmed that her Government could not afford nursery education? Is not it the height of cynicism for Labour Front-Bench spokesmen to go round City lunches trying to convince the City that they are not going to increase spending when they cannot afford it, while telling parents who want nursery education that they will fund it to the skies?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen must either put up or shut up. They have said that they will produce funding by scrapping the city technology college programme. The amount of funding that they could produce would fund all of 50 part-time nursery places for each LEA in the country. That is not overall provision of nursery classes for youngsters under five and they know it.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Although I welcome in principle the additional 150,000 children who are able to have nursery education, should not the Government consider what is achieved as a result of increased investment in nursery education? Is not it true that 20 of the top 25 nursery-providing local education authorities produce GCE O-level results that are at the national average or lower?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend and many of those same authorities have appallingly low staying-on rates post-16. Labour local education authorities should be concentrating on standards in their schools throughout compulsory school age to get the right results for children aged 16 and beyond.

Ms. Armstrong: Perhaps the Government need to make up their mind whether education for our young children is good. What consideration have they given to the remarks from the Carlton club that the Government's nursery commitment—or lack of it—is damaging, potentially vote-losing and must be corrected? Will the Minister be honest with the House about the figures which as the Carlton club says are both false and misleading? The Government claim that Britain is doing well in comparison with other European countries, but we are doing appallingly badly—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was a rather long question.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Lady knows perfectly well that there are more three and four-year-olds in nursery schools than there were in 1979 and that the Government are making £740 million available to local education authorities for the provision of nursery classes for youngsters. Furthermore, if the hon. Lady believes that she can give an undertaking that the Labour party will make nursery education available to all three and four-year-olds, I challenge her to say so unequivocally and to get it endorsed by the hon. Member for Derby, South.

Education and Training

3. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the participation rate in post-16 education and training.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The Government's plans for increasing the participation rate in post-16 education and training were contained in the two White Papers published yesterday.

Ms. Short: I welcome the White Paper that the Secretary of State announced yesterday. However, it was belated and it is a great pity that it has taken 12 years to take some action. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!".] Conservative Members may jeer, but we have one of the lowest post-16 participation rates in Europe. That means that our young people and our economy are disadvantaged. The Government should have taken action earlier.

Will the Minister reconsider two points? First, there is a division between the administration of sixth forms and that of further education colleges and sixth form centres. There is a real danger that it will perpetuate the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This seems to be rather contagious. Will the hon. Lady ask a question, please?

Ms. Short: I am asking a question. I asked the Secretary of State to reconsider the matter for a serious reason.

Secondly, the Minister is unwilling to reform A-levels in the way that was recommended by Higginson and many others. Will he reconsider that so that we can give parity of esteem to academic and vocational attainment?

Mr. Clarke: First, I am grateful for the hon. Lady's welcome of yesterday's White Papers. Like many other hon. Members, she was unable to be here yesterday—she was no doubt engaged elsewhere. She may have noticed that the White Papers were welcomed by those with whom she normally shares those Benches—the Scottish Nationalists, the Welsh Nationalists and the Liberal Democrats. Will she persuade Labour Front-Bench spokesmen to welcome the White Papers and to stop making churlish points against them which are slightly confusing most of the issues?

On the status of further education and sixth form colleges, I believe that independence from local education authority control will enhance the ability of both types of colleges to respond to student demands. I agree that we want both to offer a wider range of courses and to make no sharp distinction between the academic sixth form colleges and vocational further education colleges. We want to continue blurring that distinction.

I have forgotten the hon. Lady's third point.

Ms. Short: A-levels.

Mr. Clarke: On A-levels, there is a difference between us. We propose an over-arching diploma which people can attain either by achieving the right standards in academic courses with A-levels or in vocational courses with BTEC or national vocational qualifications, or a combination of the two. I do not think that it would be right to scrap A-levels, which is the Labour party's position. We must keep up academic standards and put in place vocational qualifications that reach the same high standards and the same parity of esteem.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If three questions are asked in one supplementary, we shall make very slow progress. One question please from Dr. Hampson.

Dr. Hampson: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of just how much the polytechnics will enhance their appeal as a result of his resolute decision yesterday to abolish the artificial barrier between polytechnics and universities which, despite the flannel from the Opposition, was always supported by Labour Governments? Will my right hon. and learned Friend use his powers under schedule 7 to the Education Reform Act 1988 to change by order the names of any polytechnics that wish to do that, so that we avoid what would otherwise be a three-year marketing blight?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome for the proposed change, which will be supported by directors of polytechnics, including at least two former Labour Ministers, Chris Price and Gerry Fowler. I shall consider the possibility of allowing name changes in the interim period, but I believe that we shall have to wait for the necessary legislation to pass through the House. With regard to overseas contacts, polytechnics are disadvantaged because they have to explain that they are, in anybody else's language, universities—certainly, of the same standard as other universities. The name distorts students' preferences when applying for entry to polytechnics. I shall take up my hon. Friend's interesting suggestion that I may have powers to act on this issue.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State spoke a moment ago about the new diploma being over-arching. How exactly will it work? Will it be a relabelling of existing exams such as A-level, AS level and BTEC, will it be a separate examination in addition to those, or will it involve a reform of those examinations together with a system of credit accumulation?

Mr. Clarke: It will underline the equal status for the different qualifications by setting out standards that are genuine equivalents, so that they can be recognised by those in universities and employers and by setting a bench mark to establish the equivalents between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications or, increasingly, a combination of the two. I explained that system yesterday and I think that it is perfectly comprehensible.

Mrs. Currie: May I welcome the marvellous plans that have been announced for post-16 education, particularly to take colleges out of local authority control and reduce the unnecessary differences between polytechnics and universities? Would my right hon. and learned Friend like to make himself a real hero in Derbyshire, where we have neither a university nor a polytechnic? Will he consider designating one of the colleges, preferably in Derby, as a polytechnic as soon as possible?

Mr. Clarke: I am disappointed to hear that I have not yet attained heroic status in my neighbouring county of Derbyshire. I have recently designated a college in East Anglia as a polytechnic, having been advised that it had the standards and comprehensive nature of courses to justify that description. We shall retain quality and I look forward to the day when a college in Derbyshire will reach the right level of quality to become a university, rather than a polytechnic. My city of Nottingham benefits considerably from having within its boundaries a first-class university and polytechnic and I am sure that Derby aspires to the same.

Exam Results

5. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will encourage schools to publish their exam results; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Schools are already required to publish details of their GCSE, A-level and AS-level exam results in their prospectuses.

My right hon. and learned Friend intends in the near future to lay regulations that will extend the existing requirements. The regulations will require schools to publish their results in all examinations in a common and consistent form.

Mr. Sumberg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Is not it vital that we get on with the process and publish the information quickly so that, just as in the private sector, parents have as much information as possible before they determine which school their child should go to?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend and we shall also investigate ways of ensuring that further education colleges publish their results in a consistent form that allows comparisons between schools and FE colleges.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that unless there is early assessment and clear identification of the potential of children enrolled in any school, publishing results could misrepresent the achievements of the teachers, parents and pupils of that school?

Mr. Eggar: I agree entirely that it is important to assess children from an early age. That is why we are committed to assessment and testing for those aged seven and 11. We have had too many distressing letters from parents and individuals about how they or their teachers failed to recognise deficiencies in one sector or another. As has been said repeatedly to me, when a child is 16 it is too late to identify weaknesses. People have urged me on this matter and I believe that the way forward is to assess pupils at ages seven and 11.

Education and Training

7. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of 16-year-olds leave full-time education or training.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest provisional figures show that the proportion of 16-year-olds leaving full-time education or training after completing their compulsory schooling fell to 41 per cent. last year. That means a fall of 11 percentage points in only the past four years. The great majority of those who leave go into jobs with part-time education or training, or take part in youth training schemes. Contrary to much popular belief, only about 10 per cent. of 16-year-old school leavers in this country drop out of education and training completely and they are people who choose to reject the guaranteed training place on offer to all of them.

Mr. Bottomley: Will my right hon. and learned Friend encourage local education authorities, if not schools, to publish their own figures relating to the number of students staying on for full-time or part-time education, so that those who at present are not tempted to do so will realise that they are cheating themselves of opportunities in their future working lives?

Mr. Clarke: That is an excellent suggestion. My hon. Friend's original question concerned the proportion of students who leave, but I think that schools should be encouraged to publish their staying-on levels, which are steadily improving across the education system. A written answer to another hon. Member this afternoon will shed further light on the improvements that we are achieving in our schools.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In response to a question from me yesterday, the Secretary of State made it clear that the proposed funding for the increased number of students whom he expected to stay on after the age of 16—and, indeed, to enter higher and further education—would arise naturally out of the increased funding that each individual student attracts for the college or university concerned. On that basis, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that he envisages an overall cut in funding per student during the period of increase and that colleges will therefore be unable to maintain their present standards?

Mr. Clarke: No. What I was saying to the hon. Gentleman, and will say again now, was that our funding system was linked to the growth in the number of students. It would be a great mistake for any Secretary of State to abandon a mechanism that linked the increase in funding to the number of students attracted. The financing of our policy will be geared to its success. Our aim is to expand the number of students receiving education and training after the age of 16, but, of course, to achieve that expansion in a cost-effective way.

Mr. Butterfill: The proposals that my right hon. and learned Friend announced in the White Papers yesterday will provide considerable encouragement for 16-year-olds to stay on at school. Will he encourage Opposition sceptics to visit Bournemouth polytechnic, which has led the way in the development of vocational degrees and courses? Far from being derided by employers, such courses are now highly regarded internationally and show the way for other similar colleges of learning to develop for the future.

Mr. Clarke: I would commend such a visit to any hon. Member who wanted to see what has been achieved by Bournemouth and by many other polytechnics across the country. I have not made such a visit recently; nor, no doubt, has the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). When I have visited polytechnics, however, I have found that they have all achieved great success since—contrary to the preference of the Labour party—we took them out of local government control. They all expect to make further progress in future.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To encourage more 16-year-olds to stay on, will the Secretary of State tell us what his proposed advanced diploma offers young people over and above the A-levels and vocational qualifications which he says that it comprises? If vocational qualifications are truly to be the equivalent of A-levels, why should not the two be combined in the form of a broader advanced certificate, as Labour proposes?

Will the Secretary of State now answer the question that he ducked when it was put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)? Why should not we introduce credit accumulation as between the different elements of the advanced diploma? Will such credit accumulation be introduced?

Mr. Clarke: The diploma answers a valid criticism of the system in this country—the charge that the confusing number of qualifications of all kinds has created a maze through which parents and students must try to find their way. The structure of the advanced diploma will—like that of the baccalaureate in France and the equivalent qualifications in Germany, but, I think, in a better way than either—allow academic and vocational qualifications of the same standard to be recognised as a benchmark for advance into higher education or certain types of employment. We have introduced clarity to our system.

As I said yesterday, the Labour party insists that everybody must have the same qualifications. With the greatest respect, I must point out that it proposes to scrap A-levels and much of our vocational system and to substitute some mishmash qualification that is meant to be put modestly within the ability of everybody. That would not serve the purposes of our students or of the economy.

Credit accumulation is a perfectly sensible suggestion. In my letter to the School Examinations and Assessment Council, I cautiously suggested how we might consider it further for students who want to transfer from an A-level course to a course run by the Business and Technician Education Council.

Hendon School

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the number of pupils applying to attend Hendon school since it became a grant-maintained school.

Mr. Eggar: I understand that applications for first-year places have risen sharply since the school became grant maintained in 1989. So far this year, there have been 348 applications, compared with 270 in 1990 and 200 in 1989.

Mr. Marshall: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Hendon school's last year as a local authority school, 100 pupils applied? Is not the dramatic growth since then a vindication of Government policy and a tribute to the school's headmaster, staff and governors? Would not it be mean-minded and extreme folly to reverse the policy and ignore the wishes of parents and pupils?

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Any fair-minded individual who saw what had been achieved in Hendon in the past two years would recognise how entirely inappropriate it is for the Labour party to be determined to ignore the wishes of parents and, in effect, destroy an excellent school that has been turned itself round in a short time, thanks to our grant-maintained policy.

Sir Bernard Braine: As one who, 60 years ago, was a pupil at Hendon school and has been deeply grateful to his teachers ever since, I warmly welcome the school's decision to opt for grant-maintained status. Is my hon. Friend further aware that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) visited the school last year, he was met by an experienced member of staff who said, "Although I have always been a member of the Labour party, the school's decision to go for direct-grant status was the best decision that it has ever made"?

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend told me that, and I received a similar message when I visited the school. I am sure that pupils at Hendon school, and all hon. Members, welcome and recognise the considerable education advantages that my right hon. Friend gained from his time at that school.

Sports Council

9. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Sports Council to discuss the extra financing of that body.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Robert Atkins): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her maiden question on sport. I have regular meetings with the chairman whenever necessary and will meet him in the summer to discuss his corporate plan and additional funding requirements for 1992-93. The Sports Council's current grant in aid is £46·7 million.

Miss Hoey: I welcome the Minister to his first sport questions. I am sure that he will agree that it is time that sport had its own Question Time.

Has the Minister had time in the past few months to study the implications of the increase in VAT for sport and sports clubs? What is his view of the ludicrous position whereby for every £1 that the Government give sport they take £8 away? What will he do about that as Minister for Sport?

Mr. Atkins: As the hon. Lady well knows, VAT is a matter not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Government have demonstrated that their commitment to sport, in whatever capacity, is second to none. I do not need to take lessons from Opposition Members on how we are committed to sport and are spending money on it.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I congratulate my hon. Friend on making his maiden answer to a question on sport and on answering it so brilliantly. Is he aware that we believe wholeheartedly that when he meets the chairman of the Sports Council, he will give him every satisfaction?

Mr. Atkins: As ever, I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am not sure that I can deliver the satisfaction that he is talking about, but I shall try.

Mr. Pendry: I shall not congratulate the Minister on his first answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), which was little short of a disgrace, especially in view of the answer which he gave to me only last week when he made it clear that, given the cuts in the urban programme, the Government have stolen £15·7 million from sport and, next year, plan to find £5·3 million cuts on top of that. Is not it time that the Government stopped parading themselves as the friends of sport while such highway robbery is going on?

Mr. Atkins: Uncharacterisitically, the hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. As I said earlier in response to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), the Government have demonstrated that we are committed to sport in a variety of areas. Only a month or two ago, I was able to find a further £1 million for extra coaching, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a foundation for— *[Interruption.]* It is no good the Opposition behaving like football hooligans. If they want to hear the facts, I shall give them. In a recent speech, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the setting up of a foundation for sport and the arts, which will, in due course, more than double the money committed to sport. The hon. Gentleman should not go round whingeing about the Government's lack of spending. We have shown that we have done more than a Labour Government ever did.

Mr. Holt: When my hon. Friend leaves the Chamber, will he pick up a telephone to ring the chairman of the Sports Council and tell him that he will not pay one penny piece to Cleveland county council until my constituent, Mr. J. G. Campbell, and his son are treated fairly? The boy, who is a captain of the Middlesbrough football schools XI, has been denied the opportunity to continue to represent his home town and possibly to go on to greater things in football because the mean, vindictive and spiteful Cleveland county council will not recognise the Macmillan city technology college for the excellent place that it is.

Mr. Atkins: I find it inexplicable that people can be mean and small-minded enough to prevent a young boy who plays a game to a high standard from continuing to represent his town. My hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) will have my full support in any campaign that they care to mount

to get the youngster back playing for his town and representing his county at the game that he plays so well. The best of luck to him.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Minister aware that I, at least, am absolutely delighted that he is so interested in sport? May I advise him to get as much practice as possible between now and the next general election because he is for the high jump?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman should know better than most that his hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall, who asked the main question, is more likely to be for the high jump than I am.

Mr. Soames: Has my hon. Friend seen that in the otherwise excellent report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has a locus in this.

Mr. Soames: Has my hon. Friend seen that in the otherwise excellent report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs a suggestion that the affairs of horse racing should come under the Department of Education and Science? If that is the case, will he assure the House and the country that the Sports Council will have no part in it?

Mr. Atkins: If equine quadrupeds were brought under the control of my Department, it might at least be able to explain what they were. As my hon. Friend knows, horse racing is not my responsibility, although it has been mooted that it should be. If that were to happen, I should take the advice of my hon. Friend, who is arguably one of the most knowledgeable hon. Members on matters to do with racing.

Mr. Denis Howell: I should like, in accordance with the customs of the House, to welcome the new Minister at his first appearance at the Dispatch Box, even though we have been waiting 10 months. That is a remarkable period of gestation. As far as I can see, no new policies or initiatives have emanated. Is the Minister still in training? When will he be ready to take the field? There are many issues on which we need his advice, such as the place of team games and swimming in the school curriculum, which was discounted by the Secretary of State, and the publication of the report on youth policy on sport, for which we have been waiting three years. Most important of all— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) just said, this is the first time we have had sports questions since the Minister was appointed.

Mr. Howell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your defence of sport as well as of the House.

As the Minister believes that his Government have a better record than that of the Labour Government who, he will recall, provided financial assistance to stage the World cup and the Commonwealth games in this country, can he tell us when his Government will do anything to assist Sheffield with the world student games or Manchester with the Olympic bid? What has he got to tell us on those matters?

Mr. Atkins: It is all very well for the right hon. Gentleman to criticise me for not answering a question. In case he has not noticed, hon. Members are required to ask questions before I can answer them. The hon. Member for Vauxhall, who tabled an early-day motion criticising me for not answering questions, has only just asked me her first question. I suggest that before levelling criticism, the right hon. Gentleman should look at the beam in his own eye.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that the Government had not spent a lot of money. I remind him that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his former incarnation as Chancellor of the Exchequer, found about £100 million for football alone. That demonstrates more commitment than the right hon. Gentleman has shown since he has been shadowing me.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Was it a point of order about that matter?

Mr. Bennett: Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that there is now a ballot for questions and that it is an insult to any hon. Member to suggest——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That matter can arise as a point of order after Question Time.

Standard Assessment Tests

10. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of introducing standard assessment tests.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The testing of seven-year-olds in the core subjects started immediately after the Easter holiday. Teachers have worked hard and well on the tests. The evidence so far suggests that the exercise is going reasonably well in most schools. I will, of course, consider the experience of this year before deciding the precise form of the tests for the next year.

Mr. Wilshire: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that union and Labour opposition to the standard assessment tests is not borne out by talking to teachers and parents? I recently visited 34 of the 36 schools in my constituency and heard universal support for the principle but concern about the detail. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the detail has been organised by teachers and not by politicians? Does he agree that testing has the support of teachers and parents, which contrasts with Labour's hostility to testing and its commitment to mediocrity for all?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that there are two clear issues, which he rightly distinguishes. One is the principle of whether to test seven-year-olds on their progress through the curriculum. There is widespread support for that among the teaching professions and parents. There is even bipartisan support in the House. The second issue is the exact form of the tests, which I should wish to consider in the light of the experience of classroom teachers this year. The form of the tests had been devised by the School Examinations and Assessment Council, appointed by me, which took a lot of trouble in devising child-friendly tests in response to pressures from parents and others. We have to ensure that the tests continue to be child friendly, that they do not put stress on

the children, that they are reasonably straightforward and manageable and that they produce clear results as they evolve.

Science Funding

12. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to increase funding for science.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): The size of the science budget for 1992-93 will be considered in the forthcoming public expenditure survey.

Mr. Strang: Do the Government now appreciate that there is a science crisis? Does the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology confirm what scientists and Opposition Members have been saying for months? Surely the Minister is aware that decisions are being taken to halt research programmes, to disband research teams and to scrap expensive equipment and facilities. That will do real damage to Britain's science base unless the Government announce an additional allocation of funds to research councils for this year.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman totally fails to do justice to the outstanding quality of British science, which is highly regarded internationally. We are committed to maintaining an internationally competitive research base through the higher education institutions and the research councils. We are considering the important and interesting report of the House of Lords Select Committee and shall respond to it formally in due course. I would only comment now that the noble Lords explicitly said that they would like the research councils to have flexible budgets "without recourse to invidious choices."
It is tempting but illusory to suppose that life can be nothing but flexibility with no invidious choices.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. McFall: "It ain't working, but it's really hurting" is what one of my constituents told me in Dumbarton high street last Saturday. After a lifetime of work, at the age of 54 he now finds himself made redundant. When I next meet my constituent, can I tell him that the Prime Minister echoes the comments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that my constituent's tragedy and that of the hundreds of thousands who will surely follow in the coming months is a price well worth paying, or will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunhity to add substance to his new caring image by dissociating himself completely from the Chancellor's remarks?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has no monopoly of concern about unemployment. It is shared by every Conservative Member as well. It is precisely because we care about the impact of unemployment that we are determined to remove its cause—which, predominantly, is inflation—and we are now making substantial progress with that. If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about unemployment—I return to the point that the Opposition have ducked on every occasion—may I say that the minimum wage proposal will put many people out of work.

Q2. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ashby: In view of the recent spate of horrific incidents involving certain breeds of dogs, do the Government intend doing anything about that and, if so, what?

The Prime Minister: Everyone will have been shaken by the attacks during the past few weeks, particularly the horrific attack on Rucksana Khan at the weekend. I have discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and we are persuaded that urgent action must be taken. From midnight tonight, the import of dogs bred for fighting, such as the American pit bull terrier and the Japanese Tosa, will be banned. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will wish to make a statement to the House tomorrow setting out further action to deal with the problem. But it is clear that such dogs have no place in our homes.

Mr. Kinnock: I strongly support what the Prime Minister just said about fighting dogs.

If, as the Prime Minister insists, hospital trusts are not outside the national health service, why does he refuse to allow people to have a vote on the future of their local hospital?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support on the subject of dogs. It if comes to legislation, which it may well do after my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's statement tomorrow, I hope that his support will hold good. It is a matter that the whole country will be keen to see brought to a conclusion at an early stage.

On the subject of the health reforms, the right hon. Gentleman is aware, for he has clearly heard what has been said by many people in the health service in recent days, that he was wrong about health care outside the national health service. *[Interruption.]* Health trusts are outside the bureaucracy of much of the national health service, but they remain within the national health service. They will treat NHS patients. That is the position now and it will remain the position in the future.

Mr. Kinnock: What we are hearing, Mr. Speaker, is the hysteria of defeat. The Prime Minister does not appear to understand his own legislation. The trusts are not owned by the national health service. They can buy and sell, hire and fire and make contract deals without regard to the national health service. They are not part of a national health service. *[Interruption.]* That is the big truth and the Prime Minister should face it.

The Prime Minister: There are none so deaf as those who do not wish to hear because they know they have been wrong. The right hon. Gentleman has now been told by sufficient people who are professionals in the national

health service that trusts are part of the national health service. If he is not prepared to correct the mischief that he and his party enunciated last week, that is a matter for them, but the whole country knows that he is wrong and that trusts are part of the national health service.

Mr. Kinnock: On the subject of listening, the Prime Minister should hear what was said in Monmouth last Thursday. The people of Monmouth spoke. The right hon. Gentleman and his party were beaten fair and square, so why does he not listen to them and stop the second wave?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman and his candidate won the Monmouth by-election, and I congratulate the candidate on so doing, but I cannot congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the accuracy of the campaign that was run on that occasion. The Monmouth literature was deceptive and untruthful, because

"self-governing hospitals continue to fulfil the crucial criterion of being a part of the NHS: they provide, free of charge, health care that is funded by the taxpayer's contributions. What they have opted out of is the central bureaucracy of the NHS".

Those are not my words; they are the words in a leading article in *The Independent*. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is true.

Mr. Amery: My right hon. Friend will have noted that the dictator of Ethiopia appears to have left the country. Will he seize the initiative now and instruct our representative there to make immediate contact with the successor Administration to find out how we can help to lead the country towards democracy? Britain liberated Ethiopia from the Italians in the second world war. We now have a chance to lead the country towards democracy.

The Prime Minister: President Mengistu's resignation this morning is welcome. We hope that it will facilitate the peace process and enhance donors' ability to help those in need in Ethiopia—a matter of considerable importance to us all. I urge both the Government and the opposition movements to take this opportunity to negotiate a lasting settlement of their differences and, above all, to put an end to the civil war from which Ethiopia has suffered for too long. We shall do what we can to help to bring that about.

Q3. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: Does the motion about Europe signed by 105 of the Prime Minister's colleagues represent Government policy? The Prime Minister has often repeated the assertion that not this Parliament but a future Parliament must decide whether we should adopt a single currency. Is that assertion based on the belief that a future Parliament would contain more people who hold our view that Britain should take the lead in the development of Europe and its currency and fewer of the type of people who signed the motion?

The Prime Minister: We are increasingly taking the lead in the European Community. That will become more and more evident as month succeeds month. Discussion in the two intergovernmental conferences is still at an early stage and negotiations will continue throughout the rest of this year. The Luxembourg paper that is identified in the early-day motion is but one part of that negotiation. The early-day motion rightly identifies elements in the paper that need to be changed, and will be changed, before the negotiation is complete.

Q4. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hannam: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the health service reforms are already working well—*[Interruption.]*—and gaining the support of most hospital staff throughout the country? Is he aware that this year Exeter health authority will purchase some 200 hip and knee operations from the London hospitals? That will reduce waiting lists and help the London hospitals. Therefore, will my right hon. Friend continue to champion the rights of the patients, in contrast to the Labour party, which champions bureaucracy and the trade unions?

The Prime Minister: Indeed, I will, for that is the basis of the reforms. I welcome the example provided by my hon. Friend of a health authority using the opportunity of the reforms to secure better and, in many cases, speedier treatment for patients in the local area. Similar improvements are evident in many parts of the country for those who wish to look and see.

Mr. Jim Marshall: May I take the Prime Minister's mind back to his meetings with Ulster Unionist leaders last week? *[Interruption.]* Perhaps hon. Members should listen. Will the Prime Minister confirm that there has been no change in the basis of the discussions between the constitutional parties in the Province as a consequence of his meeting with those two Ulster Unionist leaders?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that there has been no change in the nature of the discussions. As we speak, there has been no session of the talks yet. Discussions are continuing with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the hope that the talks can soon begin. For the sake of all the people of Northern Ireland, I hope that all concerned will speedily find a basis on which the talks can go ahead.

Q5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the polytechnics were given control of their own affairs —*[Interruption.]*—they have recruited a further 36,000 students? Now that colleges of further education have been given the same freedom, what does my right hon. Friend think will be the result?

The Prime Minister: From what I could hear of my hon. Friend's question over the hubbub, I think that he was commending the way in which the polytechnics have flourished since they were given their independence. That is certainly the case. Any director of a polytechnic will confirm that to anyone who seeks the information.

Miss Lestor: Referring to what the Prime Minister said about the economic consequences of the minimum wage, we do not have a minimum wage in Eccles or, indeed,

anywhere else, yet unemployment increased in Eccles by 100 between last month and this month. Can the Prime Minister explain why that is happening?

The Prime Minister: I suggest that the hon. Lady reads the Fabian pamphlet, which is about to be published, which lists a substantial number of jobs that would be lost if a minimum wage were introduced. There is no way in which the hon. Lady can get away by wriggling. The minimum wage proposals will cost jobs and it is Labour party policy to destroy those jobs.

Q6. **Mr. David Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: My constituents in Basildon—indeed, people throughout the country—would be grateful if my right hon. Friend confirmed that the Government, in their spending plans, are able to distinguish between overriding priorities, key priorities, top priorities and urgent priorities. Opposition Members certainly cannot. *[Laughter.]*

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a point that is so telling that it has even caught the imagination of the Opposition. Our priorities are indeed clear, but that is certainly not the case with the Labour party. Labour's campaign co-ordinator has said that education is a first priority; the overseas aid spokesman has said that aid is a top priority; the shadow Chancellor has said that manufacturing industry is a key priority; and just this morning it happened again. Asked for Labour's plan about "Son of the GLC", the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, "It's a first-term commitment." *[Interruption.]* I shall wait until Opposition Members are silent.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I am prepared to wait until the Opposition listen. The reality is that their programme does not add up. It never has, and it never will. It all points towards higher taxation, and that is what we should get.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:

William Edward Huw Edwards Esq, for Monmouth.

Points of Order

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Madden: I wish to raise a point of order of which I gave you notice.

Mr. Speaker: But this occurred last Tuesday.

Mr. Madden: I gave notice to the Secretary of State for Health also.

On 14 May I asked the Secretary of State for Health about the 300 redundancies to take place at Bradford health trust. In reply he said:

"The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that there will be 300 redundancies in the trust. There is no question of that."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 146.]

I have since received, in a plain brown envelope, the business plan for Bradford health trust, paragraph 1.5 of which states——

Mr. Speaker: Order. With the greatest respect, I must stop the hon. Gentleman here. He intimated to me that he wanted to refer to a matter which first arose at Question Time last Tuesday—a week ago. I hope that he will not mind my reminding him that I replied that we could not allow points of order in connection with something that had happened a week before. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because answers to questions are not my responsibility.

Mr. Madden: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I passed a note to your Secretary, Mr. Speaker, explaining that I wished to refer to the paragraph of the business plan that says:

"changes in the level and style of service, together with the results of competitive tendering will lead to a reduction in the workforce of about 200 during 1991"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has heard me say, and the whole House knows, that I cannot be held responsible for answers to questions. This is not a matter of order for me. *[Interruption.]* Will the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench please allow me to deal with the matter? I am not responsible for answers. The hon. Gentleman must find other ways of taking up the matter with the Government. It is a matter for the Government, not for me.

Mr. Madden: I advised the Secretary of State for Health that I intended to raise the matter, Sir. It seems that, whoever is attempting to conceal the truth about health care, it is not my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) or the Labour party; it is the Secretary of State for Health, the Conservative party and the Government.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will always support the occupant of the Chair in this matter. Replies to questions are not a matter for the Chair and points of order in connection with them waste a great deal of time. We have enormous pressures today—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] We certainly have; I know.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a separate point of order, which I believe falls within your remit, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is urgent. Within the past half hour I have been to the Table Office to table questions on national health trusts. The Clerks tell me that Ministers are keeping an open mind for a little while longer in accepting questions on trusts, but that, in a very few days' time, there will be no possibility of hon. Members' tabling questions on national health trusts. That leads to enormous confusion, Mr. Speaker. Do we have the right to ask questions about national health trusts or do we not?

Mr. Speaker: The answer to that question—and the answer that the hon. Gentleman received from the Table Office—is yes.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely it cannot be acceptable for Ministers to refuse to take questions about what is happening in opted-out hospitals, which, we are assured, are still in the national health service. Are we really to accept the argument—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not a point of order."] It is a point of order. Are we really to be told, Mr. Speaker, that hon. Members on both sides of the House —who I assume want to be assured that their constituents are getting proper and fair treatment in the national health service—are no longer to be allowed to table parliamentary questions about it?

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that the Table Office is accepting questions.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on an important matter which will need to be resolved very shortly. It is clear from today's proceedings that the national health service will continue to be a matter of debate and disagreement in the House. You will be aware from the Register of Members' Interests that approximately one third of Opposition Members are sponsored by unions associated with the national health service. I seek your ruling, Sir, on whether those hon. Members—whether in speeches, points of order or questions—should declare their interest so that we can tell whether they are acting in the interests of patients or porters.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The rules remain the same. It is not our convention to declare an interest at Question Time; it is our convention to declare an interest during debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that questions on opted-out trusts could be tabled in the Table Office. Will we be able to table such questions after the recess, or will we be denied our parliamentary rights by Ministers opting out of their responsibility?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), who originally raised this point, raised a hypothetical question. He prefaced his remarks by saying that he had been told that something might happen in the future. I cannot tell what will happen in the future. I can tell the House what is happening now, and I have said that those questions will be accepted by the Table Office.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I believe that this is a point of order for you, Mr. Speaker, because it affects the powers of the House. We have in this House, through Acts of Parliament, surrendered certain powers to European institutions. Since that time, it seems that further powers are being sought by stealth. Neither you

nor, I am sure, any hon. Member could have imagined at the time of our passing the Single European Act that we were surrendering to European institutions powers over tobacco advertising. Should it come about through majority voting that such legislation was foisted upon this country, would it be incumbent upon the House to facilitate the passing of such legislation?

Mr. Speaker: This is another thing that might happen in the future. I cannot answer that question now.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have just heard the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) refer to the fact that some of my hon. Friends are sponsored by COHSE and NUPE. I think that he had the figure wrong, but that is by the way. Will you, since you are are in charge ultimately of the register, make it clear that it would be a good idea if in future another item were registered—how many Tory Members have private health care?

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On two separate points of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Let us have one, please; I think that that is enough for me. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am trying to help the hon. Member. I understand that it is the wish of the House to get on with its business rather rapidly today. In view of the number of hon. Members who wish to participate and the fact that the major debate ends at 11.30 pm it will not be possible for me to call all hon. Members who wish to speak in that debate if I have points of order now.

Mr. Nellist: I am grateful for that information, Mr. Speaker.

On my point of order, in reply to two previous points of order you said that a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) was in the past and therefore it was too late to raise it now, and that the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) was in the future and therefore hypothetical. If it is put to you as a point of order that the Table Office has said that there is now doubt about whether hon. Members will be able to ask questions about national health trusts, should you not at least reassure us that you will investigate what statements have been made and report to us tomorrow?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will deal with all these points of order together. I think that will be quicker.

Mr. Sheerman: Further to my earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was merely seeking guidance so that hon. Members might know whether they will be allowed to carry on asking questions about national health trusts. We were told only 15 minutes ago that our ability to ask questions was very soon to be halted by the Government. Does that mean another week, another month or another two months?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member had an informal discussion with a Clerk in the Table Office. I have not had that opportunity, which I certainly intend to have when I can leave the Chair.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have just been to the Table Office, because I would have been as dismayed as Opposition Members if indeed we were not allowed to table questions about national health service trust hospitals. The Table Office has confirmed to me that it is perfectly happy to accept all questions about NHS trusts. Furthermore, it has confirmed that no one—no Minister and no official from the Department of Health—has suggested or intimated an unwillingness to answer questions.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that it was Mark Twain who spoke about "Lies, lies and more damned lies." Are we not hearing another distortion from Labour Members in respect of——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not know whether the hon. Member was in his place yesterday, but I said that the word that he has used is not one that I wish to hear in the Chamber.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Arising from the quarter of an hour of questions within points of order is a serious principle. We have had a quarter of an hour's debate, initiated by the Labour party, in prime time on national health service trusts. Is not that an abuse of the procedures of the House by the party that wants to put porters before patients?

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure that that helps much. Points of order have been made from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Sir Gerard Neale (Cornwall, North): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a worthy point to remind anyone who is following our exchanges that, irrespective of whether the trusts continue in the instances to which reference has been made, all the patients treated under them will be treated under the national health service?

Mr. Speaker: These are matters of political controversy and are not points of order for the Chair. We should now get on with the business.

BILL PRESENTED

Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (Amendment)

Mr. Bob Cryer, supported by Mr. John Battle, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. George J. Buckley, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Ronnie Campbell, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mr. John Cummings, presented a Bill to add tosa dogs and pit bull terriers to the Schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 June and to be printed. [Bill 164.]

Education (Audit Commission and Abolition of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools)

3.47 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools and to transfer its functions and responsibilities to the Audit Commission; and for connected purposes.

The House will be well aware that the history of education since the 19th century has run alongside the development of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools. For more than 150 years the inspectorate has sought to give impartial and independent advice to successive Department of Education and Science Ministers on changes, projects, policies and developments in maintained education. Throughout that period its impartial and independent role has been carried out satisfactorily. It is no coincidence that the only area of the education service that has gone without reform is the inspectorate. Largely, its role continues to be one of advice and caution in addition to publishing reports and giving advice to successive Ministers.

Although the inspectorate has become impartial and independent, it has become increasingly irrelevant to the means by which modern education is measured and adjudicated upon as a result of the changes that have taken place in the service. Indeed, it has become a self-perpetuating oligarchy whose function has been to give generalised statements on the position of maintained education in such a way as to cause doubt and concern without providing the means by which improvement can be made. For example, the inspectorate says that a third of our children could do better in a state school—that in itself is a statement of disruption—without providing the means by which improvements could be made.

Every activity that we have undertaken in the past 10 years has been designed to take responsibility down the line to individual schools and to require schools to be more open about the type of education, the quality of education and the standard of education that is reached within them. Yet the one arm of activity open to government is still dealing in a generalised and unfocused way with the provision of activity in the state system.

The House might have seen an answer to a written question tabled by me from the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science on 16 May. I asked

"the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of *(a)* school-related and *(b)* non school-related reports published by Her Majesty's inspectorate in each of the last two years . . .".

The Minister's answer was:

"In 1988-89, 403 inspection reports were published of which 231 were related to schools. In 1989-90, 358 reports were published, of which 144 were school-related."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. *222*.]

While accepting that those that relate to individual schools might well have been of use to the parents, governors and teachers in those schools, I argue that the remainder of the reports have opened up some doubts about the effectiveness of that type of reporting. Indeed, when the inspectorate publishes a report on the teaching of physics or English in the primary phase, for example, I wonder how much of that permeates down to the level of the school. Such reports only offer reading and reporting matter for specialised institutes for education in some of our lesser universities.

I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House share my view that we have reached the point when it is right to demand a change. The Secretary of State has announced such a policy and I believe that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) also has strong views about the future role of the inspectorate. Although he and I might disagree about the objectives behind our impulses on this matter, there is no doubt that it is a common shared belief that the inspectorate can no longer continue for the next 10 or 20 years in the way that it has done.

I welcome that admission and declaration that probably all parties represented in the House seek to bring about change in the role, responsibility and functions of the inspectorate.

My Bill proposes to abolish the inspectorate as it stands and to transfer its functions and responsibilities to the Audit Commission, which would then have a responsibility to set up an educational audit commission with more tightly focused terms of reference to measure implementation and results stemming from the Education Reform Act 1988 and to evaluate the cost effectiveness of many of the local initiatives which might be spread across the nation as good practice.

The second change proposed by my Bill is to bring in fresh people from outside the world of education to act as inspectors so as to maximise input into the inspectorate, while getting a better and broader view from those who have had experience of commerce, education, industry, politics and possibly the church, who could comment on the products of our education system.

While not condemning the inspectorate for past work, I believe that the House accepts that there has to be a change in its focus. My idea of an educational audit commission would be one way of achieving that.

The Bill ought to go into the parliamentary process. I believe that it commands support from both sides of the Chamber. I accept that there are those who question my motives, which are not political and do not stem from any consideration except five years as a schools Minister, a number of years as a school governor and from being a taxpayer. We need to get a better deal from the inspectorate than we have had in the past. I hope that the House will accept my Bill as a declaration of intent for reform to better times for the inspectorate.

3.55 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman seeking to oppose the Bill?

Hon. Members: Reactionary!

Mr. Spearing: I may be a reactionary, but I share the experience of the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). We have both been subject, in different ways, to the strictures of Her Majesty's inspectors. I was a teacher for some 14 years and the hon. Member was a Minister for five years. Perhaps he is, therefore, responsible to some extent for the state of the education system, which the inspectors have successively reported to the public and this House. The hon. Gentleman, the Conservative party and the Government must take some responsibility for that.

I do not dissent from the hon. Gentleman's view that some evolutionary development may be desirable within Her Majesty's inspectorate. Perhaps the role of HMIs could be adjusted along the lines advocated by the Labour party. There is some concern in education circles that, although, under the Education Act 1944, Her Majesty's inspectors must evaluate, inspect and report, they also fulfil functions in relation to best practice. There is not always full agreement about best practice or about whether, if it works in one place, it will work in another. Several newspaper articles have discussed that subject recently.

The hon. Member for Dartford is not asking for evolution, development or even for reform; he is asking for abolition, which is a quite different matter. Her Majesty's inspectors were established by the Privy Council long before so-called maintained education under the Education Act 1870 was dreamt of. They report to the nation on behalf of the tax-paying public, such as the hon. Gentleman and I, on the general results obtained from that wholesale expenditure of moneys which is a right and proper function. Indeed, if that function were not fulfilled the hon. Member for Dartford and his hon. Friends would be the first to say that it should be fulfilled under section 77 of the 1944 Act.

The hon. Member for Dartford wants not only to abolish a corps of ladies and gentlemen who, whatever their views on certain teaching methods, have centuries of experience and skill to contribute for the benefit of the country and a certain status in the minds of most professional teachers and administrators; he wants to transfer it to the Audit Commission, which is not beyond controversy itself. The Audit Commission is responsible for local government expenditure, but the hon. Gentleman does not want local government to administer sixth form colleges and many aspects of education hitherto looked at by the inspectors. The Audit Commission is concerned with expenditure, economy, efficiency and effectiveness —and therefore with the perceived value of expenditure.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will agree with me that educational results are not simply a commodity. It is clear that they are in demand, but they cannot be measured like substances such as wood, stone, cheese, bacon or butter, which can be sold in a market and precisely evaluated, stored and moved around. Probably the most dedicated and best professional teaching and the most effective learning take place in schools with special difficulties. Some may perceive virtually no results of that. However, I have had pupils in my charge when a teacher has said to me, with perhaps a bit of exaggeration, "What is the use, Mr. Spearing? We teach them to read in the term time and they forget in the holidays". What satisfaction can be gained even with enormous expenditure of emotional and professional effort?

I am not saying that this should not happen, but in education value for money cannot be considered in the same way as even some of the more basic functions of local government. Yet the hon. Member for Dartford wishes to hand over Her Majesty's inspectors of schools to the tender mercies of organisations created by the Government in local government legislation at the beginning of the 1980s. He forgets that education is not entirely a matter of pounds, shillings and pence. It is not a commodity with which one can deal precisely and scientifically.

Her Majesty's inspectors belong to Her Majesty. There is some debate in education circles about what that means precisely. Her Majesty, through the Privy Council that founded the inspectorate, is exercising some degree of independence from the Executive, the Secretary of State for Education and the Ministers of the day, the professions, local authorities, professional associations and those important but under-noted people, principals of colleges of education and educational academics. The inspectors are independent from all those people. They go, see, speak and make reports on which they can be subjected to questioning.

We all know that in the past 10 years education has undergone rapid change. My noble Friend Lord Callaghan of Cardiff precipitated a debate on the subject about 12 years ago in a celebrated speech at Oxford. He concluded the speech by saying:

"What a wise parent would wish for their children so the nation should wish for all its children."

That is the watchword of Her Majesty's inspectorate. Long may it remain so. I beg to oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 96, Noes 136.

Division No. 149] **[4.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Couchman, James
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hill, James
Holt, Richard
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Knapman, Roger
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John

Wiggin, Jerry
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Marion Roe and
Mr. John Marshall.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Fyfe, Maria
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Battle and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

INTRODUCTION OF DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 12, at end insert "a community care supplement"

4.12 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following Lords amendments: No. 2, in page 3, line 6, at end insert

", to any one of which may be added a community care supplement payable out of the National Insurance Fund."

The Government's motion to disagree with the amendment.

No. 3, in page 3, line 36, at end insert—

"(5A) The weekly rate of the community care supplement shall depend on the individual circumstances of a severely disabled person. In particular it shall depend on the extent to which he is severely restricted in his ability to perform normal personal care and domestic tasks because of his disablement, on the extent of his need for help, attention or supervision from another person, on the cost of securing the required help, attention or supervision, and on such other factors as the Secretary of State may prescribe.

(5B) For the purposes of subsection (3) above—

(a) a community care supplement shall not be payable in addition to a payment from the Independent Living Fund;

(b) providing his circumstances qualify him for a payment from the Independent Living Fund, a community care supplement shall be payable to a severely disabled person in lieu of such a payment when the payment ceases on the expiry of the life of the Independent Living Fund Trust on or before 8 June 1993; and

(c) payment of the community care supplement shall be disregarded for the purposes of assessing housing benefit and community charge benefit."

Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 3, in line 8, after 'supervision', insert

'on the need for a special diet'.

The Government's motion to disagree with the amendment.

Mr. Scott: I am conscious, in moving the motion, that the amendments bring us to an issue to which both sides of the House attach much importance—the position of the most severely disabled members of our community. I have considered, and in most cases listened with much care, to speeches made in debates in the House and in another place. I am sure that the House will want me to concentrate on the substance of the issues rather than to raise detailed objections to the amendments.

I do not intend to detain the House by focusing on details, other than to make two points: first, the Lords amendments for the creation of a community care supplement within disability living allowance are, as I shall seek to convince the House, unworkable in practice.

Secondly, it must be perverse to provide, as one amendment does, for the community care supplement to be paid from the national insurance fund, when the rest of the benefit, of which it is supposed to be a part, is paid from general taxation. I well understand that that was used as a device to raise the subject properly for debate and I am happy that it gives me an opportunity to explain where the Government stand.

I do not think that I am oversimplifying matters by saying that at each stage in our discussions of this issue during the Bill's passage two main points have been made. First, there was some pressure on the Government to devise a regulatory statutory replacement for the independent living fund from 1993. Secondly, there has been genuine concern that we should take the opportunity to clarify as soon as possible what the arrangements will be for people who are already getting support from the independent living fund. I very much understand that concern and I shall come back to it in a moment.

However, let me deal first with the desire to see a regulated benefits system replace the independent living fund. I have to say to right hon. and hon. Opposition Members who take a close interest in such matters that I do not believe that even the best legal skills that I could deploy to draft a set of regulations would come close to delivering the pattern of help provided now by the independent living fund. To "tack on" a community care supplement to a benefit on which we expect to have to make about 20,000 decisions a week would be a recipe for abandoning any serious attempt to go into the needs of individual disabled people in depth in order to arrive at a package that meets those needs.

I know that Opposition Members who have been urging the introduction of a regulated system do so with the best of intentions and motives, but we must recognise that the independent living fund has been more effective in delivering help where it is needed than was the system that it replaced. We must bear it in mind that that system was regulated statutory help with the costs of domestic assistance. At the risk of labouring the point, it clearly did not get to as many people, or as effectively, as those who are now getting help from the independent living fund.

I reiterate the point that I made in Committee and on Report—benefits that are supposedly designed to cater for every contingency end up not being understood let alone claimed by many of those at whom they are aimed. I can do no better than to quote Sir Roy Griffiths' report on community care in which he said:

"Our social security system is essentially designed to provide a standard range of benefits for large numbers of people against objective tests of entitlement. It is not an appropriate system for the direct provision of individually tailored packages of support, within a finite community care programme."

Sir Roy also rightly argued that if we were to make a successful reality of our aim, which I am sure is shared in all quarters, of enabling people to live in the community, we need to give primary responsibility for the assessment of need and for the planning and delivery of care packages to a single authority.

I remain convinced that our community care strategy is the right approach to meeting the needs of all disabled people, including the most severely disabled. Local social services authorities are now drawing up plans for April 1993. The organisations that represent disabled people now have the opportunity to ensure that local services match local needs.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister refers to a strategy for community care, but has he consulted the organisations of or for people with disabilities, such as the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, Mencap and others? Has he taken their views on board and, if so, how does he respond to their worries about cash limits?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman knows that ministerial responsibility for the introduction in due course of community care belongs to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health. We have received a number of representations about the arrangements that will succeed the independent living fund, but local authorities are already working on their plans for the introduction of community care. They have a responsibility to put their plans to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department. There is no better time for organisations of or for disabled people to begin to make clear their views about the type of packages that will be necessary in their individual localities or, more generally, across the country than when the local authorities are working out their plans. Disabled people, their carers and the organisations with which they are involved should play a major part in the designing of the services that will need to be delivered to disabled people after the introduction of community care in 1993.

The independent living fund has done a splendid job since its inception. I pay the warmest possible tribute to the trustees, the director and the staff who have been involved in all its activities. Their workload and the way in which they have tackled it have been far in excess of what was envisaged when the independent living fund was set up. It is right that not only I as the Minister, but the whole House should pay the warmest tribute to the trustees, the director and the staff for the way in which they have responded to the demands that have been placed on them.

A centrally run organisation such as the ILF could not hope in the long run to help all the severely disabled people who seek help to enable them to live independently in the community. The ILF has successfully primed the pump. It has fulfilled an invaluable role in proving that, with the right support and assistance, even severely disabled people can be enabled to live with independence and dignity in the community. From April 1993, it is right that the baton should pass to local authorities and that they should carry on and extend the good work of designing and providing packages of care for many more people than a central fund could ever hope to maintain.

The scale of the work involved brings me to the second main concern that has been raised in our recent discussions. The point has been made—I freely acknowledge its force—that some local authorities, given what else they have on their plates, will find it genuinely difficult to take on "at a stroke", to coin a phrase, from the ILF the several thousand people for whom it has worked out individually tailored care packages.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and other hon. Members whose expertise on these matters is well known made the case especially effectively on Report. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said that uncertainty about future payments from the fund was already causing disruption because disabled people could not make long-term care arrangements when they did not

[Mr. Scott]

know whether their payments would continue. The point is well made and I hope that the House will agree that it has been well taken.

Several hon. Members of all parties in both Houses have expressed the view that it was a question not solely of ensuring that the transitional arrangements met the needs of the people whom the ILF helps, but of ensuring that those people are reassured early about their future. I recognise that it is important that we should now end any further uncertainty.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek to raise a point of order further to the points of order raised at 3.30 pm. It was alleged that after the recess it would no longer be possible for questions to be tabled about national trust hospitals. I have checked with the office of the Leader of the House and I have it on its authority that that is not the case, that normal rules apply and that national trust hospitals will be the subject of questions. Such questions can be tabled. Was not the allegation just another fabrication by the Labour party on the subject?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know about that. If the hon. Gentleman was here, he will know that the points of order, which took place some time ago, were hypothetical. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I have not had the advantage of leaving the Chamber to find out about the matter. If what he has said is true, I welcome it. We do not need to hear any more about it now.

Mr. Scott: This must be the first occasion for a long time on which a Minister has been interrupted by a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the course of a debate. However, I recognise the importance of the point.

It is important that we should now end any further uncertainty. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members of all parties will welcome the proposals that I am about to announce.

I have concluded that the best way in which to give reassurance to existing beneficiaries of the independent living fund is to retain quite separate arrangements for that group. We shall not, therefore, expect local authorities to take over the role of providing for people who are receiving money from the ILF at the time at which the wider community care arrangements are introduced. Incidentally, even Opposition Members may recall that the life of the trust under which the ILF was established expires in June 1993—a few weeks after the planned introduction of the Government's community care proposals.

We will instead put in place a successor body to the ILF which will take on all existing beneficiaries and make cash payments——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, but I wish to thank him for bringing our anxieties to an end so swiftly. We have had many representations on this and we are most grateful to him.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister clarify what he meant by "a few weeks"? I understand that the Government's proposals for the community care section of their Act are to be introduced at the beginning of April 1993. If not, the present situation would continue until June and we would be talking about three months, not a few weeks. Have the Government changed their plans for the implementation of their Act?

Mr. Scott: We can query whether it will be a couple of months or a few weeks, but the hon. Gentleman has the facts exactly right. The terms of the trust expire in June 1993 and the arrangements for community care come into effect at the beginning of April 1993.

Let me reiterate and put clearly on the record the arrangements, then I shall give way to any hon. Member who wishes to question me. We intend to put in place a successor body to the ILF which will take on all existing beneficiaries and make cash payments to them in the same way as the ILF does now. The details of that body will have to be worked out during the coming months, but the principles are clear—the successor body will function in the same way as the ILF. It will be able to look in depth at the circumstances and needs of the people whom it will inherit from the ILF and to judge the most appropriate way of meeting those needs. The presumption at the outset will be that the new body will usually pay the same cash amounts to people as they had been getting the week before, but it will be possible for people whose circumstances then become worse to obtain more money to enable them to carry on living in the community.

I hope that that will come as welcome news to the more than 7,700 people who currently obtain help from the ILF. Hon. Members who follow these matters with care and, I hope with sympathy will know that in each year of the ILF's life to date we have given substantial extra sums so that new claimants could be helped. Funding in 1991-92 is more than 10 times the level at which it was when we set out in 1988-89 and more than 20 times the amount that the old supplementary benefit system domestic system addition ever provided. That commitment will continue during the 1992-93 financial year so that there will be room in the ILF's budget not only to continue helping all existing beneficiaries but to carry on admitting new people during the year.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I have been following the Minister carefully. Am I right to understand that from 1993 onwards there will be a twin-track situation with one group of people benefiting under the successor body and obtaining increased levels of support, whereas people with identical needs and circumstances will not be able to obtain any benefit under that body because those circumstances arose after mid-1993? Is not that a formula for uncertainty and misunderstanding? Will not some people be looking over their shoulders at friends and neighbours who will be obtaining assistance on which they are missing out? Surely that cannot be a stable formula for the future.

Mr. Scott: I shall not reiterate the argument that I have already deployed because I understand that the hon. Gentleman wishes to challenge it. As the hon. Gentleman knows quite well, in April 1993 it is planned to move to a wholly new arrangement for care in the community which will apply to residential care in nursing homes and to decisions made about care packages in different localities. He will recall that when Sir Roy Griffiths studied these matters he came to the conclusion that I have already outlined, that local authorities should look at the individual needs of not just disabled people but elderly people to decide what care package was most relevant to

their needs, whether that involved institutional care or care in the community, and to devise appropriate arrangements.

That applies, too, to those who have been helped by the independent living fund but, appropriate though I think those new arrangements are and much though I support what Sir Roy Griffiths concluded, we came to the conclusion, after having studied the matter, that to ask local authorities to take on whatever the existing case load of the independent living fund is in April 1993, at the same time as they will be introducing the other more general arrangements for community care, would be too much and that it made sense—not least to meet the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter—in order to put at rest the minds of those who are receiving help from the independent living fund to say that this successor body would continue the payments that are now being made and that it would also, where conditions had deteriorated but people could still live in the community, meet any additional costs that may arise.

I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will see that point. His views on community care may differ from those of the Government, but that will be the Government's policy in April 1993. I have sought to find the most satisfactory arrangements to meet the needs of those who will be the beneficiaries of the independent living fund then and to make an early announcement about what the arrangements might be so that any uncertainties can be removed.

4.30 pm

Sir Michael McNair Wilson (Newbury): Can my right hon. Friend say from which budget the successor body will draw its finance?

Mr. Scott: These matters will be discussed by the Government, but I envisage that it will be part of the Department of Social Security's budget. We shall seek funds to ensure the position of the successor body to the independent living fund after April 1993.

My response today means that we shall be spending more next year than this and that we shall be ensuring that all those who currently receive cash help from the independent living fund will carry on receiving cash help after 1993. I hope that the measures that I have announced today will meet the concerns in a far better way than the amendments that we are considering today. On that basis, I urge the House to reject the amendments.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): It says in the press that this debate was delayed until today so that the Minister could attend a preview of the Chelsea flower show. That was a contest he won. If it is also true, as some people think, that he battled with the Treasury to avoid having to make the speech we have just heard, that was a contest he lost, and he must be ashamed of having been made to oppose the Lords amendments.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West) *rose*—

Mr. Morris: I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me at least to start my speech. I know that other hon. Members want to intervene in the debate but, as I continue my speech, I shall seek to give way.

This debate is crucially about choice for disabled people and achieving full control for them over their own lives. The amendments will vouchsafe for people with disabilities the freedom of choice and independence they crave and which thousands of them now enjoy with help from the independent living fund. The right hon. Gentleman is said to take pride in the creation of the ILF. If it was his baby, he is now clothing himself, like Herod, in the ignominy of infanticide.

His commitments to existing recipients are simply not good enough. Thanks to this Government, we now see more bands of second-class disabled people than in "Son of Poll Tax". Can the right hon. Gentleman say how many people in the last 12 years have enjoyed some form of transitional protection which has disguised a creeping cut for them alongside massive cuts for others in identical situations?

The Minister has argued that, under the new community care arrangements, the ILF's role is best undertaken by local authorities. But unfortunately the new era of community care exists solely in the imagination of Ministers. Their disgraceful decision not to implement sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, thus tearing the heart out of that important Act, shows the Government in their true colours. The Minister for Health claims that the community care arrangements "reflect and amplify" sections 1, 2 and 3 of the 1986 Act. This is a good description of these so-called "arrangements": they are son et lumiere without substance. They are a fantasy for which Tory Ministers know that they will not be called to account since, by 1 April 1993, they will have been swept from office.

Anyone who saw Margaret Tebbit talking to Terry Wogan will have admired her courage in building a new life after her terrible injuries. Her triumph over severe disability is an inspiring example of personal bravery. Perhaps Mrs. Tebbit's most significant statement, in terms of this debate, was that the independence she now prizes depends on two young New Zealanders who provide the personal assistance she needs. This level of support can be essential if the most severely disabled people are to lead normal lives. To some, but by no means all, it is provided by the ILF. These amendments enshrine the assistance it gives as a statutory right. That is what severely disabled people want. They need and ask the House for a statutory right to the assistance that they need.

I have some sympathy with the view that assessment should be locally based; but it is essential that the right to support must be made enforceable nationally. As all hon. Members know, the statutory rights provided by the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 ultimately have to be enforced nationally if they are not to be infringed. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), when he was Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled, recognised this truth in his laudable decision to enforce the provision of telephones for housebound disabled people in Wandsworth under section 2(1)(h) of the Act. We want to see the same uniformity across the country in the provision of personal assistance services as in the administration of cash benefits for disabled people.

One of the ILF's key features is that the money it provides is paid direct to the disabled person, so that she or he has the power to hire the assistance she or he wants and arrange the work to suit her or his needs. This is the

[Mr. Morris]

formula which works so successfully in Denmark, Sweden and Finland; and the ILF has shown that it works equally well here.

The right hon. Gentleman will know that the issue of direct payments by local authorities was raised during the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. Despite expressing warm sympathy and even visiting local projects, health Ministers rejected Opposition amendments; but they promised further consideration before the Act came into force. This seems to have been an empty promise. In a reply to me on 10 May, the Minister for Health said that the Government had decided not to change the law

"because of the difficulties in determining which clients would be eligible for direct payments and in controlling costs."

This is crazy. If the ILF can make satisfactory arrangements, why not local authorities? They have a legal duty to decide who needs help and for the Government, with their fetish for privatising local authority services, to say that it would be more difficult for councils to control costs is a rich argument indeed.

The reply of 10 May continued:

"However, our guidance stresses the need for disabled people to be fully involved in decisions about the care which they need and points out that there is no reason why a disabled person who wants to have day-to-day management of his or her carers should not do so."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1991; Vol.190, c. 608.]

The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) put it very well in a letter to *The Times* on 9 May, when he said that, because, where help is financed by the ILF, disabled people are the employers, they are able to hire staff in whom they feel confidence. He went on to say that they

"can arrange the sort of day-to-day flexibility which suits both parties and, therefore, create for themselves the sort of life which, for example, allows for an unexpected whole-day visit to the Department of Health to lobby for the continuation of such arrangements."

The hon. Member saw the problem as one of machinery; I see it simply as a psychological block on the part of health Ministers, which, if it is not removed, will turn all the right hon. Gentleman's promises for 1993 into hot air.

My hon. Friends and I have tabled an amendment to draw attention to a particular group of people, many of whom are now terminally ill, whose problems Ministers in both Houses have been determined to sweep under the carpet. We have done this in order to warn the Government that they will not succeed in doing so, and because the daunting problems of the people of whom I shall speak exemplify those of countless other victims of the Government's so-called social security reforms of April 1988. I refer to people with AIDS, who, as I told Ministers from this Dispatch Box yesterday, are in many cases now literally dying for want of financial help from the Department of Social Security for the special diets that they so vitally need. If the right hon. Gentleman ever finds time to talk to colleagues in the other half of Richmond house, he will learn of their growing concern about the increase of HIV infection among the heterosexual population. Their PR offensive on this issue last Friday prompts one to ask why, if they are so concerned to limit the future death toll, they show such total unconcern about deaths that are happening now because of inability to afford special diets.

In Committee, I tried to make sense of the figure in the reports of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on people who need special diets, but I received very little assistance from the right hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I had to complain to the Chairman that Ministers were apparently concealing vital information from the Committee. When totally out-argued, they developed a habit of referring to detailed secondary analysis from the OPCS reports. But even when I tabled a parliamentary question specifically asking for the data to be placed in the Library my request was ignored. The written answer is to be found at column *419* of the *Official Report* of 11 March.

I was referring to the secret data that had been mentioned in Committee. These secret data from the OPCS tapes will feature in the next debate on the amendments relating to mobility allowance, where Ministers have been floundering for years. In relation to people who need special diets, we start with the clear statement in the OPCS reports that the highest additional expenditure was associated with digestion disabilities. On the other hand, extra expenditure on food varied little between the severity categories. This last fact supports the assertion of the right hon. Gentleman that many people who need a special diet will receive DLA. Of course they will, but it will be insufficient for their needs; and many others will not receive the allowance.

I think that it is worth recalling today some of the figures in various other parliamentary replies. On 21 January, I was told that

"a quarter of those expected to qualify for the lower rate of the self-care component—some 60,000 people in all—need a special diet".—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. *61*.]

A later answer, on 20 March, revealed that, of the total of 240,000 eligible for the lower care component, only 140,000 were expected to receive that help. This shortfall of 40 per cent. is not something the right hon. Gentleman has greatly publicised. The figure of 60,000 will fall in practice to 35,000.

Also on 20 March, the right hon. Gentleman told me that

"Something under 500,000 people below the age of 65 said that they needed a special diet"

and that

"nearly 200,000 of the people in this group would be in receipt of at least one of the rates of the new benefit."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. *124*.]

He attempted to justify the exclusion of the 300,000 by asserting that their problems were not, strictly speaking, disabilities. This is just playing with words. Their costs are just as great, and if they cannot afford the correct diets they may well soon become seriously disabled and die prematurely.

4.45 pm

This brings me back specifically to the situation of people with AIDS. I will pass over briefly the letter I quoted on Report from Mrs. Anita MacDonald, which blew out of the water all the figures Ministers had been quoting for the last two years on the cost of diets recommended to people with this condition. What it is essential to know now is how effective the social security system is in meeting their needs. The OPCS conducted its postal screening for the adult survey in March-May 1985. The Minister for Health told me on 28 March that in 1985 there were only 205 people alive with AIDS. The chances of one being included in the data were thus remote. Even one such person may well have died before interview. The OPCS data can therefore tell us nothing about the social security problem of people with AIDS in 1985-86—when

additions of £30 for the cost of diets were available on supplementary benefit—let alone today, when they may qualify for nothing.

So it was an additional disappointment when, on the same day—28 March—the right hon. Gentleman dismissed out of hand the suggestion that he should conduct research into the effectiveness of the social security system in meeting the financial needs of people with AIDS. He clearly just wants to bury his head in the sand. I will stress, in case he gives the same misleading reply as he gave on Report, that I am talking not just about people who will die within six months, but about people with AIDS who are determined to live, and who need the money to buy the right kind of food to enable them to do so. Our amendment, like those from the House of Lords, is thus extremely important.

I implore the right hon. Gentleman to recognise the validity of the amendments as a whole and, even at this late stage, to reconsider his position. Caroline Glendinning, in her deeply well-informed article in the current issue of *Disability, Handicap and Society*, says that, despite ministerial

"rhetoric of 'protecting' the most 'deserving', 'vulnerable' or 'needy', much of this 'protection' has been illusory."

She states that the Government's economic and social policies have done much to damage the quality of life for disabled people, and she concludes:

"The last ten years have, in policy terms, been disastrous for disabled people, involving threats to opportunities, living standards, independence and choice. Yet in response the growing strength and articulated demands of disabled people and their organisations give hope for the future."

The right hon. Gentleman knows that all the organisations of and for disabled people are united in very strong criticism of the Bill's inadequacies. To look for any exception to that truth is about as worthwhile as looking for the Kohinoor diamond in a box of Smarties. I ask him to recognise the force of disabled people's criticisms and now to respond more constructively to them.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): First, I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People for the sympathetic hearing that he has given to the arguments advanced by Members of both Houses during meetings with the all-party disablement group and throughout our debates on the independent living fund. My right hon. Friend today confirmed the importance of the fund's role and acknowledged it in his announcement of a successor body.

There is no doubt that the ILF is recognised by everyone, including Ministers, as an important cog in the wheel of provision for severely disabled people. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said in Committee, the fund is a great success not least because it has identified a real need in the community and gives disabled people the chance to exercise control over the provision made for them.

The fund filled a worrying gap which became evident in 1986, and it has proved extremely successful in enabling severely disabled people to buy in their own personal care and assistance services. For many such people, the ILF is central to independent living, and disabled people want it to be made statutory. That has been the whole gist of the argument throughout our debates.

The ILF has been administered largely by disabled people, such as the eminent Peter Large, and at present it helps more than 7,000 severely disabled people to live in the community. The average payment is about £70 per week, and the highest £400 per week. That gives some idea of the wide range of assistance that the ILF gives, and I express my thanks to all the members of the trust for their tremendous work for the ILF.

Looking to the future, we must ask ourselves to what extent social services departments, with all the diverse calls upon their funds, will be prepared to provide such levels of payment and assessment. On Monday, during health questions, I asked my hon. Friend the Minister for Health why local authorities were now being prevented from making individual cash payments in lieu of personal assistance. I asked that question because that problem is connected with the question of the ILF; the two are linked. If we do not have ring-fenced funding for community care and the ability to pay cash amounts, how can new severely disabled people be assured of help after 1993?

During the debate on a new clause that I tabled on Report, I said:

"I cannot realistically envisage that one day in April 1993 all local authorities will suddenly, magically, assess and provide individually tailored packages of care for severely disabled people in the way that payments from the ILF do."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 435.]

Many feel that community care funding for local authorities is not yet adequate, and dread a future in which they may be forced back into institutionalised residential care after having enjoyed the basic human right of independent living. It is in that context that I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that the Government propose to continue to maintain payments to existing recipients of funds from the ILF. I am especially pleased that the new body will be able to increase the amounts if the needs of those severely disabled people increase. That is different from the principle applied in respect of the replacement social security benefit system in respect of special allowances. In that case, the allowances remained static and account was not taken of inflation. In this case, the arrangements are more flexible; allowance is being made for the possible deterioration in the condition of severely disabled people and for a consequent increase in their needs.

I remain concerned that those who become severely disabled after 1993 will be at the mercy of local authorities with varying levels of performance, and I continue to argue the case for ring-fenced funding to take account of the problem. Having said that, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will ensure that proper levels of provision are given through the care in the community system, and that will remain our main concern for the future.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for his announcement today. I regard it as an achievement on the part of all those in both Houses who have campaigned on this issue and who have expressed deep concern about the sudden break that will occur when the ILF ceases to exist. We shall continue to monitor the situation carefully, but I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for listening to the arguments and for providing a solution today.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): This is a remarkable debate. We have heard the Minister eulogising the independent living fund and his supporters saying how marvellous it is, yet the Government intend to kill the ILF stone dead. How on earth can any Government operate like that? If the ILF is as good as the Government make out, it is absolutely crazy to kill it, and the Minister knows

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

full well that the reasons that he advanced for doing so were pathetically inadequate. The decision has been dictated by the political fact that the Minister cannot get sufficient money to continue the ILF. That is the basic truth about this debate.

The Minister made one of the worst speeches that I have heard from him. He boasted about how wonderfully well the ILF had done. That is fine; we accept that. But if the disabled people of the present are entitled to the kind of consideration that they receive from the ILF, the disabled people of the future should be entitled to precisely the same consideration. Why should they be second-class citizens?

The Minister talked about the ILF passing on the baton to local authorities. How can he use such euphemisms? What if local authorities drop the baton because they are butterfingered? Many local authorities are hamfisted and will drop the baton and, as a consequence, disabled people will suffer. With a great fanfare of trumpets, the Minister says, "Local authorities are preparing their plans". That sounds marvellous. They are preparing their plans, we gather, for community care for disabled people. That is wonderful. There is just one thing wrong with the statement. I have been in the House for 25 years—some would say that that is far too long, but never mind—and I remember hearing the same refrain in respect of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. Ministers said, "Local authorities are preparing their plans." We all know what happened. Countless local authorities neglected their responsibilities under the Act, implementation was patchy and after 21 years it has still not been fully implemented. There is absolutely no point in the Minister telling us that local authorities are preparing their plans because we are not convinced—and we are not convinced that they will take the baton that is passed to them by the ILF either.

The hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) works closely with me. I am the chairman of the all-party disablement group and he is its secretary. He works very hard. Having said that, I think that he was a trifle too diplomatic today. I suspect that the fact that the Minister praised the hon. Gentleman and mentioned the efforts of other Conservative Members while failing to refer to those of the Opposition is a sign of the impending general election. The Minister was just a trifle selective, although I do not complain about that because I know that Opposition Members are marvellous, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) will tear the Government to shreds, as the Minister knows, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has already made a fine speech. However, I want to avoid party politics.

When the hon. Member for Exeter said that many people were afraid that the funding of community care was "inadequate", he was taking diplomacy to its extremes. He knows quite well that it is not merely inadequate but pathetically inadequate. Community care is neglected by local authorities, and there is no point in the Minister saying that authorities will do the kind of job currently being done by the independent living fund.

I have 5,000 points to make, but I will sit down now because many hon. Members wish to speak and I see my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), the Opposition Whip, glaring at me from the end of the Front Bench.

I believe that the Minister is making a very serious mistake in ditching the ILF and handing responsibility to local authorities. He will be there this evening, with a wad of banknotes in his pocket like a gambler, with a majority of 100 in the Division Lobby. At the end of the debate, he will have lost the argument, but he will win the vote. He is presenting us with a fait accompli.

I ask the Minister this: if, as is certain, he wins the vote and gets this killing of the ILF through, will he seek legislation to enable local authorities to make cash payments? I think that the all-party disablement group would support him very strongly on that. If the local authorities can have those powers, it will go a very short way towards ameliorating—not condoning, but ameliorating—the crime that he is about to commit by killing the ILF.

5 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the successor to the independent living allowance for those 7,000 people benefiting from it. It will be reassuring to them, even if it brings a shadow of a doubt into my mind as to why the Government are not entirely confident that the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 will not be able to provide for these cases from 1 April 1993. I shall be interested to hear my right hon. Friend's explanation.

The disability living allowance, which is central to the Bill, seems on the face of it to be a sensible amalgamation of attendance and mobility allowances. Where there were two benefits there will now be just one. Fewer and simpler allowances always have much to commend them, especially if they make it easier for disabled people to know what is on offer. But that gain is negatived if administrative neatness detracts from the help that was originally available, or if the funding arrangements are varied and left with a margin of doubt about their payment.

To that extent, I understand and sympathise with those organisations representing the disabled which are concerned about what will happen when the independent living fund is phased out in 1993. I know that the fund is discretionary. I know that the Government have given assurances that the local authorities will take on responsibilities for the costs of domestic assistance within their new community care duties, as set out in the National Health Service and Community Care Act. But, leaving aside the 7,000 people to whom I have already referred, who are covered by the successor structure which my right hon. Friend outlined, for the newer claimant that must depend on the funds available and the sensitivities of local authorities to what is being asked for.

As I think the House knows, I am the president of the National Federation of Kidney Patients Associations. The federation has expressed to me its concern about what will happen when the independent living fund goes. It shares my worries about how local authorities will react.

Kidney patients on dialysis at home have the cost of paying for a carer to help them with their machine and to be available while dialysis is taking place. As I have told the House before, any suggestion that the attendance allowance at the lower rate for the cost of the carer is very

far from the truth. Undoubtedly, many of those who receive dialysis at home, and who are less fortunate in the amount of income that they have, have had to turn to the independent living fund for assistance to cover the cost of a carer. Therefore, they are worried about what will happen when their situation is dealt with by their local authority. Additional heating and diet, which has already been mentioned by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), are costs that apply to all kidney patients who are on dialysis. Then there is the question of additional laundering requirements, particularly if a kidney patient is on CAPD—continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis.

I know that those costs do not come immediately under the amendment that we are discussing, but they are nevertheless the costs of staying alive for kidney patients and therefore have to be met from some fund or other. Once upon a time those patients could rely on the additional costs being met by supplementary benefit. Then they were turned on to income support. Now, of course, they do not get any provision built into the Bill to which they can turn for support. So they wonder what statutory provision is being made for them, other than the community care proposals, to which I have referred, when the independent living fund disappears. I understand that the federation is not alone; other charities have the same misgivings.

If I am not to consider supporting their Lordships' amendments—and, as a kidney patient, my sympathy is obviously with the federation, even though I am now freed from the iron discipline of thrice-a-week home dialysis—I shall want reassurance from my right hon. Friend that the successor to the independent living fund does not mean that his Department is doubtful about the effective start-up of financing of the National Health Service and Community Care Act when, in theory, it comes into effect in April 1993. I hope that I have drawn the wrong interpretation from his announcement this afternoon, but the very fact that he felt it necessary to give the House that reassurance raises a doubt in my mind, which I hope that he will look at.

Mr. Wigley: The point that the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) made a moment ago is well made. If the new system is to be entirely reliable for those thousands of people who will come on stream from 1993 onwards, deserving of and needing the sort of support which the independent living fund is giving at the moment to an increasing number of people, that raises the whole question of the Government's confidence and the degree to which they have worked out their strategy for 1993 onwards.

Another point about that date is the future of local government itself. We know from discussions that have gone on at other times in the Chamber that there is a question whether we shall be moving in the next three or four years to a new structure of local government, with unitary authorities. If we do, authorities that are still finding their way forward may have to deal with not only responsibilities under the legislation that we passed two years ago, but with this additional responsibility.

We have all seen in our constituencies cases concerning people who are entitled to mobility allowance. A person aged perhaps 67 or 68 who has difficulty walking and who developed that difficulty at the age of 63 or 64 gets the mobility allowance. An identical person, perhaps living next door, who did not develop that condition until he or she was 66 or 67 does not get the mobility allowance. That person does not understand why, in identical circumstances, the person next door gets the allowance and he or she does not.

We are now building up a similar structure, in which some people will be consolidated for ever more, presumably. If youngsters are getting help from the independent living fund now, they may live for another 50 years and they will have this ongoing institution, in whatever new structure it exists, to ensure that they are safeguarded from the failures and shortcomings of the alternative structure that the Government are introducing.

Is that really what the Minister is telling the House today? Is he saying that it is necessary to have this sort of structure on an ongoing basis to look after this group of people, which may build up by 1993 to be 15,000 or 20,000 strong and thereafter will taper off, over 50 years, until there are only one or two left? Is it a fact that the structure will exist for their benefit because of the Government's lack of confidence in the alternative that they are putting forward.

Mr. Scott: I sought in my reply to the hon. Member's earlier intervention to reassure him about this. I will try again, and perhaps at the same time I can address one of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson).

It is not because of any lack of confidence in the arrangements for community care, but for two distinct reasons that we concluded that we needed to make continuing arrangements for the existing case load for the ILF in April 1993.

The first reason was that the local authorities would then be taking on many new responsibilities. To ask them to take over an existing caseload with whose individual needs they would, by definition, not be familiar at that point of change would be to put an excessive burden upon them. The second reason concerns a point that has been made very strongly to me in recent weeks and months. The existing recipients of money from the independent living fund are very concerned, as April 1993 approaches, about the ability of local authorities to take them on as going cases. I know that the hon. Gentleman, who is a fair-minded man, will recognise that I was seeking to meet genuine doubts and fears in the hearts and minds of existing beneficiaries of the fund.

Mr. Wigley: I welcome any assurance that has been given to those who were suffering from a feeling of insecurity as a result of the changes that have taken place. Any assurance that can be given is to be welcomed. I suspect, however, that in responding to one problem the Minister has opened Pandora's box and that a host of other problems will emerge. Surely the Minister is not saying that the new structure that will operate from April 1993, under local government control, will be incapable of taking on a going concern that has already been assessed and under which payments are being made. If the new structure is incapable of taking on that system, how will it be able to assess the 4,000 or 5,000 additional cases that will come to it each year, which until now have been dealt with by the independent living fund? I understand that the ILF will retain the responsibility for looking after those people that are on its books in June 1993, even though the nature of individuals' disabilities and needs may change.

[Mr. Wigley]

In some instances financial needs may increase. It seems, however, that the ILF will continue to deal with them. It will monitor and assess, and in parallel with that operation there will be a similar structure doing an identical job under local authority control. Do I understand that aright?

Mr. Scott: In essence, yes. However, is the hon. Gentleman really asking me not to go down the road that I have outlined? Is he saying that whatever the case load of the ILF come April 1993, it being administered by ILF staff who know the individual cases and who have seen social workers' reports, the files should be distributed to the areas in which individual beneficiaries live and local authorities should be asked to take them on, when at the same time they are introducing their arrangements for the assessment of cases within the areas for which they are responsible? I believe that the Government have found a better way and a more reassuring approach. If the hon. Gentleman examines his conscience, I am sure that he will not advise me to take the route that he appears to be advocating.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister is saying that, in the second quarter of 1993, local authorities should not have the burden, as it were, placed upon them. It is possible that in nine, 12 or 24 months from now the local authorities will have the ground ready under their feet, and will then be in a position to cope more easily with any burden that is placed upon them. Is the Minister providing a continuing solution for the 50 years or so that beneficiaries may live beyond 1993, or is he saying that he is offering a solution that will stop individuals worrying, and that it is possible that a year or two after 1993 a unitary assessment system will be introduced that will be geared to local authorities?

I suspect that this is the tip of an iceberg. I accept that for every good motive in the world the Minister is trying to safeguard beneficiaries from a feeling of insecurity that has spread among them because of the way in which the changes to the system have unfolded, but he is introducing new problems that will have to be tackled by the next Conservative Government, or the next Labour Government. Whichever party wins the next general election, the Government who are formed will have to examine these matters in considerable depth. A basis must be established of rights and entitlements. Individuals should have the security that will come from knowing that payments will be made because of their statutory entitlements. Such rights should be built into legislation.

5.15 pm

I am not too certain whether the words that have been adopted by those in another place are the right ones, but it is clear that a significant majority of their Lordships supported the amendment. They agreed to that amendment because they were aware of the needs of the client group that we are discussing. I hope that at the very least the Government will give an assurance that they will find some way, even if not through this legislation, between now and 1993 to ensure that when the new system comes on stream everyone who has a need will know that he will have an entitlement, and that the state will ensure that it will be met and that no one will go without.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I am grateful for having the chance to speak in this important debate. I am sure that all those who have participated in it have a personal responsibility for disabled people in their constituencies. Many of us have national responsibilities and help the disabled through charitable involvement or in other ways. I am especially proud to be one of the vice presidents of the recently established Conservative disability forum, which was founded by my friend and colleague, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). In addition, I am chairman of ADAPT—access for disabled people to arts premises today—an organisation which comes under the Ministry with responsibility for the arts, which considers applications for Government funding. I am also a member of the Select Committee on Employment, which recently produced a report on disability and employment.

My reason for referring to those organisations and to the Select Committee, and indirectly to the three Departments to which they are related, is to show the Government's commitment to the disabled, which is entire and stretches across the spectrum of the Government's work. The Government have their heart in the right place and are prepared to dip into the public purse. They encourage private initiatives in every way they can. We are led by a Prime Minister whose dedication to the disabled is surely known to everyone. One of his first actions on becoming Prime Minister was to honour an existing commitment to give awards to young deaf people. He has continued to commit himself to the cause of the disabled. That is, however, merely indicative of the attitude of his Ministers towards those who are disabled, and none is more committed than my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People.

The independent living fund was the creation of my right hon. Friend. I know that well because a couple in my constituency had a baby with devastating disabilities. There was acute hydrocephalus and non-development of the major brain stem, and the baby should have died. Shortly before the fund was announced, I discovered that the child had not qualified for any allowance at home because it was not meant to live. Under the old understanding, it would have remained in hospital until it died, fairly rapidly. By some freak, the child survived for some months. I went to my right hon. Friend the Minister and immediately thereafter the ILF was brought into play. That was triggered by his concern and his initiative.

I attempted to intervene at the beginning of the speech of the Opposition's spokesman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), because of his slight on my right hon. Friend the Minister, and because of his slight, through my right hon. Friend, on the Save The Children Fund. Monday night's event—I have no knowledge of who was there—was designed to benefit the Save The Children Fund and raised many thousands of pounds for that superb organisation, which has Government support from the Overseas Development Administration. I am ashamed of the Opposition spokesman for having slighted the effort that was made to support the Save The Children Fund, which has cared for millions of disabled children during its 70-year history.

I am concerned about those who benefit from the current independent living fund arrangements, but I do not share the Cassandra-like wails of the Opposition about the ability of local authorities to undertake responsibility for the disabled. Why not? The answer is that in the area which I represent—I invite others to have regard to their constituencies—the local authorities have already taken responsibility. The Griffiths report proposed packages of

independent care for independently-minded people who happen to be disabled, and that is already happening in the Torridge and Devon, West constituency. I pay special tribute to our foremost local authority staff member in Torridgeside who deals with such cases—Mr. Ian Rice and his outstanding team, who are a jewel in Britain's crown in this work. Indeed, experts from Scandinavia have been sent to see the ways in which that team is already effecting the principles and practice enshrined in the Griffiths report, which has been part and parcel of the work of that department in Torridgeside for some years now.

I do not share the apparent disregard for the capacity of local authorities to cope properly and well, strenuously, imaginatively and sensitively with the needs of the disabled. No, I do not doubt the Government's commitment to putting the funding behind that. Let us consider the Government's track record. Since 1979, spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled has increased by 152 per cent. in real terms. Expenditure overall on recipients of help with mobility and care costs has increased by more than £5 billion in real terms since 1979 and the number of people helped as a result of this new Bill is 1·9 million, compared with 400,000 in 1979. That is no small achievement and I am confident that the Government will continue down that splendid route.

While welcoming the continuation of the independent living fund for the 8,000 people who currently benefit from it, and however much we welcomed its initiative several years ago, it could surely only be a stepping stone. Is it right and proper that we should ask for the continuation for ever of a system which makes judgments on cases from the top and not at grass roots level as the Griffiths report properly recommended. I am convinced that, although transitions are always difficult and we are quite properly fearful for the needs of those disabled people whom we care for in our constituencies or in our circle of family and friends, nevertheless, the independent living fund can only be a stepping stone because decisions should properly be made at patient level and not at the top. That is why I welcome the fine tuning arrangements outlined by my right hon. Friend the Minister today.

I strenuously support my right hon. Friend's work and ask him to encourage the Secretary of State for Employment to look kindly at the proposals in paragraph 23 of the recently published report of the Select Committee on Employment that

"The Government should explore urgently the possibility of equal opportunities legislation for the employment of people with disabilities and report to Parliament on its potential effects and costs in the labour market."

That is within his remit because the disability working allowance is already within it.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The Bill does not meet the needs of the majority of disabled people in our communities who depend upon benefits. In fact, it does absolutely nothing for more than 4 million pensioners who have disabilities. The Bill will help about 300,000 of the 6·2 million people in our community who have disabilities. The extra costs that will be incurred as a result of the Bill are nothing compared with the cuts which took place in the Social Security Act 1990. Indeed, the comprehensive review of disability benefits that the Government promised had not taken place before the publication of "The Way Ahead".

People who have disabilities have many extra needs which have not been tackled in the Bill. The issues that we are discussing do nothing for them. For example, the Bill does nothing for people with disabilities who need extra heating as a result of being confined to their homes for long periods of time, or for those people who have extra dietary needs. One hon. Member mentioned the dietary needs of those who suffer from AIDS and other people have dietary needs. The Bill does nothing for people who have special transport needs—I have many such cases in my constituency—or for those with extra laundry needs.

I am surprised that the Minister should rise from the Government Benches to say that the Government's record on work for those with disabilities is good. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) cited one major Government strategy in the area of employment which was supposed to help people with disabilities. I find that amazing because the Government's employment policy for those with disabilities has led to one of the most massive cuts in funding that I have known in the 25 years that I have been working with people in the community. I refer to the massive cuts in the Government's employment and youth training programmes for people with disabilities.

Some months ago I asked a question of the Minister and the record shows that cuts have been made successively in recent years, and at the present time even more so—about 30 per cent. All the voluntary organisations in the country have got together to tell the Government that people with disabilities are not being recruited to Government training programmes. Therefore, it is misleading and scurrilous for the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West to cite that example from the Conservative Benches and she should reconsider her comments.

The independent living fund should be placed on a statutory basis. It should not be discretionary, or grace and favour, but should be available as of right. Let us suppose that from 1993 local authorities will have responsibility for their areas. I remind the Minister of the Government's record since 1979. The Government have removed from local authorities £58 billion worth of funding in real terms for local government services. With that record, it is no wonder that people working in the voluntary sector and advocates for people with disabilities do not believe that the Government will provide the resources that will be needed. As the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) has said on a number of occasions, those promises are worthless without ring-fencing the sums of money available. That is certainly the case when one considers the Government's track record.

When we are told that community care packages will meet people's needs, we must ask what the Government have done to help local authorities to plan and prepare for the implementation of the community care provisions which will be in force from 1993. The Government have entered into discussions on the structure of local government and those new structures will be in place from 1994. We have the ludicrous situation in which the Government are transferring major policy areas to local government in 1993, and the promise of a reorganisation of local government in 1994, which is a recipe for chaos and disaster. However, in recent years the Government have shown that they are prepared only to pass the buck to local government without passing the resources.

Today we are concerned with people who have disabilities. They have rights and they should not be dependent upon charity. People on the independent living

[Mr. David Bellotti]

fund have been somewhat reassured today by the statement made, but for those who join that area of need in the future there are but empty promises.

If the Government are funding that trust well now, why do they not reallocate that sum of money and introduce ring-fencing? They should pass not just the responsibility, but the funds, to local authorities.

The amendments from the other place seek to improve a poor Bill and are concerned with those who are most seriously disabled. The community care supplement would help to meet real needs. I ask the House to support the amendments and disabled people.

5.30 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke: I agree with the response of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) to the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), much of whose speech did not seem to relate to reality. Before she leaves the Chamber, may I say that I much preferred her televised speech on St. Stephens green in support of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) during the election campaign for the Tory party leadership to the speech that she made today. The hon. Lady was also uncharacteristically ungracious in her remarks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who had only just started his speech when the hon. Lady sought to intervene. She has much to learn from him about disability and other issues.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I hope that I was not being discourteous to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) about his ability or his depth of feeling for the disabled. However, his inapposite and insensitive criticism of my right hon. Friend the Minister's support for the Save the Children Fund, which has been pre-eminent throughout this century in the care and protection of handicapped children, caused me to intervene towards the beginning of his speech, which was where he put in his poisoned dart.

Mr. Clarke: When the hon. Lady reads my right hon. Friend's speech, she will see that he did not refer to that. For some reason, the hon. Lady seems to be in a little tantrum. I hope that the Minister, the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), will give her a ticket for the Chelsea flower show so that her speeches will not be so difficult in future debates.

On a more serious point, although I am sorry to dwell on the hon. Lady's speech, I profoundly disagree with her suggestion that the Prime Minister has acted in the interests of Britain's disabled people. One of the first issues over which he presided was the shameful announcement that the remaining sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 would not be implemented. When we consider the independent living fund—the vital issue that is before the House today—we shall see the importance of advocacy and its relationship to any strategy for community care.

The Government's approach to the independent living fund is less about passing the baton than about passing the buck to local authorities. Our greatest worry about that relates to ring-fencing. By passing responsibilities to local authorities, the Government are not providing the vital resources that will make their decisions meaningful, which must be an enormous worry to disabled people and their carers. That aspect of Government policy worries me and the organisations of and for disabled people.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Does my hon. Friend remember opening Wallace Court, where the Scottish Council for Spastics was operating a centre in Elderslie in my constituency? Is he aware that that centre now faces a massive annual deficit because of lack of available funding, part of which came from local authorities, which are experiencing difficulties collecting the poll tax from, among others, mentally handicapped people?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I remember visiting Elderslie in his constituency and the splendid provisions made for the disabled in the Strathclyde region. My hon. Friend's example underlines the fact that, as with the independent living fund, it is not enough for the Minister simply to say that he looks forward to 1993 and to give vague promises for community care, which the Government seem loth to explain. Indeed, they have not even explained why they have postponed their policies for community care—the only aspects of their legislation that many people welcomed. My hon. Friend's point stands—it is profoundly unfair to offer local authorities the prospect of making the provisions that they clearly want for disabled people but deny them the resources that are fundamental to meeting those objectives.

Despite the Minister's earlier response to me on disability income, I am still worried about the Government's thinking on cash limits. Will the Minister take this second opportunity to clarify that matter? It is not simply a case of people who do not benefit at the moment not benefiting in the future, but a question of whether the Government's policy on cash limits, which has so discredited the social fund, will apply here. As the Minister did not take the opportunity of my earlier intervention to state firmly that cash limits would not apply, will he do so when he winds up?

The central thrust of the Labour party's comments suggests that the Minister cannot come to the House yet again with a proposal—in this case the independent living fund—and present it in a vacuum. What is the Government's understanding of community care and how do those issues inter-relate? He must be more positive about what will happen in 1993 and about ring-fencing, advocacy and the future of local government. That fair point has been made by several hon. Members. I am sorry to say that, as so often in the past, the Minister has been disappointing in his failure to win battles with the Treasury. I hope that he will not be too disappointed when some of us question the proposals that he has made today.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): First, I wish to apologise to the House for my absence from part of the debate. Unfortunately, I was carrying out parliamentary duties elsewhere.

I support the Government's position in opposing the amendment for a number of fundamental reasons. First, the Government's record on this subject is exemplary. Although the Opposition have criticised it forcefully, 400,000 disabled people were being helped in 1979 and today 1·9 million are helped and expenditure on disabled

people has increased to £5 billion. Those figures are not trivial and show the deep concern on both sides of the House for the need to help disabled people.

The major reason why we should look again at the Lord's amendment, which, on the face of it, has some credibility, is my right hon. Friend the Minister's announcement about the future of the independent living fund and his proposals to replace it. Under the system, 8,000 severely disabled people have their payments protected and will benefit considerably. That meets some of the arguments that have been put forward against the amendment.

The clause contains a disability living allowance that meets the major problems encountered by all hon. Members in their constituencies in relation to the attendance allowance and mobility allowance. I am pleased that the Government, as I understand it, will accept the changes in the mobility allowance test and we shall see the end of the walking test, which was nonsense. If someone can walk 100 yd or whatever distance, it does not mean that he can go on and on walking, certainly not without pain. I am pleased to see the back of that.

There will also be additional resources——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We are not discussing the clause, but specific amendments. So far, the hon. Gentleman has not addressed those amendments and I hope that he will do so.

Mr. Hind: I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Lord's amendment shows that the Lords have no confidence in the system of community care to be introduced. In 1993, responsibility for caring for severely handicapped people will be placed on local authorities, through their community plans, and they will have to make individual evaluations of the needs of those in their care. That will negate the need for the community care addition to the clause as proposed in the Lords amendment. Therefore, I urge the House to set aside the amendment. The disability working allowance and the disability living allowance are great improvements, but we must view them side by side with the proposals for care in the community which, effectively, negate the need for the amendment.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): What the 7,000 people who currently rely on the independent living fund need more than anything else—perhaps more than the money that they receive from the fund—is security and a sense of permanence in the arrangements made in individual cases. I am glad to see Ministers nodding. I hope that between us, and in the light of the protracted proceedings on the Bill for 27 hours in this place and the other place, we shall be able to find some means of providing those 7,000 people with that permanency and security. Perhaps we failed the test in not coming up with something to meet that need.

The Lords proposed a new clause and the idea that the ILF should be found a place in statute so that it would have a long future. We all know that the deeds of the ILF, which was created in 1978, expire on 8 June 1993. If we are to believe that the ILF should be retained and found a place in statute, we must test whether the ILF has done its job.

I have attempted to read the various Committee reports, proceedings in the other place, briefings circulated by all the organisations interested in the issue, and pronouncements by eminent hon. Members on both sides of the House. I have yet to find one individual who can deny that the ILF has not only done its job well, but done it in an exemplary fashion of which all those who have worked in it should be proud. I have not heard one logical argument to show that the ILF should be wound up, that it is inefficient, a creation of socialism, a nationalised industry or wasteful of public expenditure—all the usual things that are chanted whenever a decision is made to abolish an institution.

5.45 pm

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who was present earlier, and his colleagues on the former Social Security Select Committee pronounced, as one, that they wished to see the ILF retained. Today and on other occasions the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) has spoken of the superb work of the ILF and was glad to pay tribute to it. I am pleased to associate myself with those remarks. The all-party disablement group, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and other hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber have all said that the ILF has done a remarkable job and is worthy of being retained to carry out its current functions.

That leads me to believe that there must be something else wrong with it—perhaps its shape, organisation or structure. Recently, we have heard much about the agencies being created within the social security sphere. We have heard about the contributions agency and the benefits agency. I agree with the concept that all those agencies are to be established to create a more customer-sensitive service that will deliver, be localised and responsive, and carry out the valuable functions that hon. Members believe all such organisations should have.

The ILF meets every one of those criteria and more. It disburses amounts of money ranging from £60 to £700 with great sensitivity, touch and responsiveness to those severely disabled people who require assistance. It cannot be faulted on that count. The Minister eulogised the ILF in his earlier speech, and I do not blame him, although whether it was a eulogy or an epitaph, I am not sure. The ILF deserves a eulogy, and I am more than happy to add my voice to those who congratulated the Minister on the significant part that he played in creating the ILF.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) was a little harsh in referring to King Herod and infanticide, but he is known for his bruising style. I would use another religious analogy—Abraham's relationship to Isaac. Almost as an act of faith, the Minister is placing the beloved child he created on an altar in which I do not believe he has faith. I do not believe that the Minister feels that it is appropriate to sacrifice that child on the old altars of public expenditure—maintaining tight budgets when dealing with those in greatest need. Perhaps the Minister does, but I do not feel that he has made a convincing case today as to why the ILF should be wound up.

There was a happy ending in the case of Abraham and Isaac. I do not want to be tested too heavily on my religious knowledge, but I understand that divine intervention occurred at the last moment. In this instance, divine intervention, or its closest equivalent, might come, not necessarily from an election but from No. 10 Downing street—from John, son of God, or son of Brian, I am not too sure which. He has shown that he is not averse to a little political opportunism to get a bit of the credit for the

Government, and I welcome that. He has given money to the haeomophiliacs, an action commended by all hon. Members. We have seen a little nod in the direction of severe weather payments, and an attempt to claim perhaps greater credit than he deserved. Such a concession is welcome, and there have been a number of other cases where nice little announcements have been made to bolster the Prime Minister's image. If it means that 7,000 disabled people will receive a better deal, I for one will be the first to congratulate the Prime Minister.

Mr. Scott: I detect——

Mr. Allen: I am giving way to the right hon. Gentleman. [HON. MEMBERS: "We thought that you had finished."] I think that that was an intervention from a sedentary position. Perhaps I may continue. I am being heckled more severely by my hon. Friends than I usually am by Conservative Members.

We now appear to be proceeding towards "son of ILF". It seems that there is to be a successor body, albeit a transitional one. The Government intend to transfer the cases currently dealt with by the ILF to local authorities as far as is possible, but those that cannot be so transferred will be dealt with by the transitional body.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) pointed out, that is not so much passing the baton as passing the buck. I do not know what the transitional body will be called. Perhaps it will be the National Organisation for Transitional Arrangements, whose acronym would be "No, ta", or perhaps it will be called the Nick Scott Benevolent Fund. Whatever it is called, it will continue to administer a number of cases, although the vast majority will be transferred to local authorities. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, local authorities are not yet in a position to deliver in many of those cases. They cannot yet provide the care package needed by those who currently depend on the ILF.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) put his finger on it. We shall end up with a rolling programme —a programme that will roll a number of people out of "son of ILF" into local authority care. We have not been told how that will be done, or the basis on which people will be assessed as being capable of being transferred. That, too, will cause considerable anxiety among those who are currently entirely dependent on the ILF. They will need to know as soon as possible whether they are in the domain of the local authority, that of the ILF or that of "son of ILF".

Mr. Hind: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Allen: No. The hon. Gentleman came in late, and made a speech that may not have been entirely relevant to the amendment.

Local authorities themselves are beset by a number of problems. They will have to introduce the package amid other major structural changes. Whichever party is in power, changes may be made that will affect them directly. "Son of poll tax" will be hanging round their necks; the financial squeeze will, of course, continue. In the middle of all that, we shall be expecting authorities whose social services budgets are already under considerable stress to pick up a number of difficult cases.

I am afraid that, as the hon. Member for Exeter pointed out, local authorities may be unable to maintain a large proportion of those people. As he said, authorities may have to put many of them into accommodation that they would not normally have chosen; if the ILF payments had been maintained, those people would probably have been able to stay at home. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) rather let the cat out of the bag when she made a passing reference to private care. I do not quite know how that will fit into the equation, given the number of people who will be taken out of the domain of the ILF and, perhaps, put into private rather than local authority accommodation.

Today's announcement about the proposed transitional arrangements raises more questions than it answers. Seven thousand people look to us in this place—and will look to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People—for clarification. An election is on the way. I hope that, with the return of a Labour Government, it will be clear that the independent living fund will continue to serve the people whom, as even the Minister has admitted, it has served so well. Once he has answered some of those questions, we shall wish to divide the House.

Mr. Scott: I detect, on both sides of the House, a wish to reach an early decision on the amendments. I shall therefore sum up quickly while also addressing a number of the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) either was not listening to the announcement that I made in my opening speech, or was being mischievous at the end of his. I emphasised—not only in my opening speech, but in response to a number of interventions in the speeches of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and others —my anxiety to set at rest any fears that the ILF might have about its future, given its existing caseload. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North suggested that at the point of change, and in the succeeding months and years, there might be picking and choosing in relation to which existing ILF beneficiaries would be transferred to local authorities. That suggestion is without foundation: the entire caseload will be the responsibility of the new body. There will be no question of its being shifted to local authorities.

I realise that change is never comfortable, and I am therefore not surprised that anxieties have been voiced this afternoon. It is, however, something of an irony that three hon. Members who were present when the establishment of the ILF was announced should say what they are saying now. The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) expressed disappointment; the hon. Member for Caernarfon said that it was an interim step towards the privatisation of a facility; the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) saw it as an abdication of the Government's responsibilities. Those three are the most passionate defenders of the success of the fund. But I do not wish to make too much of that; I do not want to embarrass Opposition Members.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: No. With respect, the right hon. Gentleman did not give way to my hon. Friend and I want to get on. The right hon. Gentleman may be very embarrassed about what I have just said, but I see no reason to give way to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) paid warm tribute to the trustees of the ILF, as did I. He

particularly mentioned Mr. Peter Large, with whose name I would couple that of Pauline Thompson: both have played a distinguished part in the workings of the fund over the past three and a half years or so.

My hon. Friend also referred to community care and the Griffiths report. I think that decisions should indeed be made at local level. Local authorities ought to be in a position to know what is needed in the community, and also what is available; they should also be able to take steps to supply what is lacking.

I understand the point that my hon. Friend made about the difference between cash and care, and his observation about the ILF's unique attribute—its ability to pay cash to people so that they have control over their own care needs. I am anxious to ensure that, when the new arrangements come into effect, it will be possible for disabled people and their carers to exert the maximum influence and control over those arrangements. Now is the time when the consumers, as well as the providers, of care should be working to ensure that, when we reach the transition point in 1993, appropriate arrangements are in place.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South was on song today: he was in good voice. I was nevertheless astonished at the strength of his arguments. If I may say so, however, he was wrong to suggest that local authorities were merely being asked to prepare plans. Local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare plans, and submit them to the Department of Health; they must also show that they are able to respond to local needs.

The right hon. Gentleman was also anxious about the resources that would be available, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson). They —or, at any rate, the right hon. Gentleman—may know what those resources will be; if so, the right hon. Gentleman is privy to information that is not yet available to me. We shall have to see, when April 1993 arrives, what arrangements are made for local authorities to deal with community care.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury welcomed the new arrangements for the administration, assessment and adjudication of DLA. I am pleased that we have been able to demedicalise those arrangements and rely much more on self-assessment. I am confident that the arrangements will work well. I am at pains to put to rest the fear of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury that people on current rates of attendance and mobility allowance will be moved to the lower rates of the mobility or care components of DLA; they will retain their present entitlements.

6 pm

The new system will be reliable and flexible and I have explained why it is essential to move to the new arrangements for community care in 1993 and to place the main responsibility on local authorities. The existing caseload should be looked after by a successor body to the ILF.

I understand the strong feelings of the hon. Member for Caernarfon—he has made this point to me more than once —about the age limit for mobility allowance and the new mobility component of DLA. I told him that it would cost almost £2 billion to abolish age limits. Not even the Labour party, if it had the opportunity, would be in a position to take that step.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) for her defence of the Government's record, which I have mentioned more than once at Question Time and on previous occasions. The Government far outstripped their predecessor in making provision for severely disabled people.

I am sorry that the Chelsea flower show entered our discussions. Not only the Labour party but "Atticus" seems capable of putting two and two together and making five.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) raised the scare about imposing cash limits on the independent living fund. I have already made it clear that we shall spend more on the ILF next year than this year and, as the ILF does now, the successor body will be able to make increased payment when the need arises.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister used the word "scare", but I can assure him that that was not intended—it was a genuine search for knowledge. If he can assure us that there will not be cash limits, I shall be happy.

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Those who support the amendments are anxious to reinvent the complexities of the supplementary benefit system. Such a system would be unworkable in practice. A combination of our two new disability benefits at national level, providing the generality of care, and local authorities, providing individual community care for disabled people, and the protection that I have announced for the existing ILF caseload is the right package of measures to continue this important work, and I urge the House to disagree with the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 198.

Division No. 150 **at 6.03 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob

Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John

McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 disagreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 4, line 36, at end insert—

"(aa) he falls within subsection (1A) below; or".

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 5 and Nos. 7 to 12 inclusive. I must inform the House that some of the amendments involve privilege.

Mr. Scott: I do not intend to weary the House by recapping at length the problems that we have had to overcome on this issue. I know that all hon. Members will accept that the problems were severe and I pay the warmest possible tribute to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for his intervention in the case, for his sympathy when I was not able to respond, and for his welcome now that we are able to do so.

We have been struggling to find a way of distinguishing the relatively restricted group of people whose mental handicap and behavioural problems are so severe that they make it effectively impossible for them to walk from the much wider group of people whose problems in walking can be overcome if they are supervised and guided by another person.

The amendments would ensure that the smaller group of severely mentally handicapped people who have severe behavioural problems will get the higher rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance. We propose to demarcate that group by relying on entitlement to the highest rate of the care component as a filter and then directing simple questions to the professional people who will be best able to judge how severe the effects of the mental handicap are. That makes me optimistic about solving the problem.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with voluntary organisations such as Mencap and the Spastics Society which have also put much effort into helping us with the means of identifying the target group. With their assistance, I am confident that we can get the benefit to those who need it.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The Minister knows that it is totally farcical to say that I slighted him in referring to his attendance at the preview of the Chelsea flower show if, as I hope, he did attend. Indeed, I congratulated him on a contest he had won and, by implication, on both his good sense and good taste in attending the preview as I myself used to do when I was the Minister. My point was that, if it is also true that the right hon. Gentleman has been battling with the Treasury to avoid having to oppose Lords amendments tonight, that unfortunately is a contest he lost.

Naturally I very much welcome this penultimate chapter in a long-running saga which occupied us here and in Committee on many occasions before the Bill went to the Lords. A very great deal of the credit for what has been won must go to Lord Allen of Abbeydale and to Mary Holland, formerly of Mencap and now of RADAR, who fought for years through a fog of misinformation from the DSS. It was in relation to similar amendments in another place, on a previous Bill, that the OPCS data tapes first made their appearance. It was highly appropriate for my colleague and friend, Lord Carter, to say in Committee in another place that they appeared over the horizon like the United States cavalry coming to the rescue and ending up like Sherlock Holmes's dog which did not bark.

Ministers in Standing Committee assured us that they wished to make this move, but they were not content with Opposition amendments and could not work out one of their own. For some time it seemed touch and go whether any Government amendment would be tabled to the Bill.

I have called this the penultimate chapter of the saga because the chickens will not hatch until the regulations referred to in Lords amendment No. 10 are laid. Can the Minister shed any light on the contents of the draft regulations? Will he give a commitment to work closely with, in particular, Mencap and the Spastics Society?

These amendments also place in primary legislation the entitlement to mobility allowance, or the higher mobility component of the DLA, of people who are both blind and deaf. Are we to infer that previous regulations were ultra vires? As the Minister may know, the Disability Alliance, which has worked so very hard on this Bill for people with disabilities, and in assisting hon. Members on both sides of the House, states:

"Clearly . . . confusion has been caused by a legal mistake on the part of the Government."

Can the Minister give any further information about take-up? Is he satisfied that the regulations are being correctly interpreted by examining doctors and adjudicators? Will he explain why the entitlement of double amputees was not also put on the face of the Bill? May we

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

be assured that, in a year's time, his legal advisers will not have changed their minds, as they have apparently done with the deaf and blind, and seek a further amendment to the law? Might not inclusion in the Bill assist take-up?

I thank Ministers for listening finally to the insistent representations made to them, in both Houses over many years, and also to the cogent arguments of voluntary organisations. I hope that they will follow the same pattern, perhaps rather less dilatorily, in regard to some of the other extremely important issues we have raised in the debates on this Bill.

Yes, it will cost money to do so, but it will also avert human suffering. That more money is needed is demonstrated by a simple comparison that refutes every word that has been said from that side of the House about how vastly disabled people have benefited from this Government's policies. The comparison is that, while average earnings have risen by more than 20 per cent. since 1979, disability benefits have risen by only 1 per cent. That is the central truth about all the self-congratulatory comments we have heard from some Conservative Members in tonight's debate and why much more needs to be done if we are really to address humanely the unmet needs of disabled people.

Mr. Wigley: I thank the Minister for his kind remarks and even more for having at last succeeded in getting this problem sorted out. The group of mentally handicapped people who, at one stage, were deemed to be entitled and who then, for many years, after the case law, lost that entitlement will now again be entitled to the allowance. That is a matter of considerable pleasure to Mencap, to the Spastics Society and to a number of other organisations that have worked hard on the problem. I also thank the Minister and the Secretary of State for the reception that we have had on a number of occasions on which delegations have been to see them.

Can the Minister give any idea of when the provisions will come to fruition and people can apply for benefit? There are different dates for different sections, so it would be helpful if the Minister could give us an idea.

Amendment No. 7 deals with the deaf-blind. Will the Minister clarify—the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) referred to this—the position of the existing help given to deaf-blind people under the provisions introduced in April 1990? It appears that it is a question of interpretation. For those who are almost wholly deaf but who have some residual vision, there is a test of the extent of that vision. People have to say how many fingers are being held up at a distance of 1 ft. The point must be considered seriously.

Let us consider the case of a person who is wholly deaf and who is walking down a road. That person needs sufficient residual vision to see whether a car is coming. However, the fact that he or she can see four fingers at a distance of 1 ft does not mean that he or she can discern a fast-moving vehicle at a distance of 50 yd or 100 yd. In the spirit of last year's provisions, those people should be eligible for mobility allowance because they cannot get around without help. However, the interpretation may be restrictive and needs to be considered. Having said that, I am grateful that the Lords amendments were tabled and that they will help many people.

Mr. Scott: I take the point on the deaf-blind. We thought that it was entirely sensible to take the opportunity to include them within the group in primary legislation. I am conscious that the arrangements that we introduced within mobility allowance for the deaf-blind have not been working out as satisfactorily as we had hoped. We have again consulted Sense about the matter. Those who are interested in such matters will see an improvement in the take-up and many more people whom we believe would be entitled will receive the benefit.

The new benefit will come into operation in April 1992. We want the regulations to be in place well before that. As the hon. member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) knows, claimants will be able to apply for the new benefits from February next year, well in advance of the introduction of the benefits. That will make administrative sense and it will be useful for our customers to be able to benefit from the arrangements. We shall, of course, keep in the closest possible touch with Mencap and the Spastics Society in drafting the regulations. I am sure that that will be of great benefit.

Mr. Ashley: May I warmly welcome the Minister's announcement? It is an advance. I add my congratulations on the efforts of Lord Allen, Lord Carter, Mary Holland and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

Will the Minister carefully monitor the whole proceedings to ensure that none of the mentally handicapped or deaf-blind people who are deserving will be excluded?

Mr. Scott: We shall be anxious to ensure that the regulations do the job for which they are intended. With the help of the Spastics Society and Mencap, I am sure that we can achieve that. Although I did not pay tribute to the people mentioned by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I take the opportunity to do so now.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 5 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 4, line 38, leave out from "that" to "guidance" in line 39 and insert

"disregarding any ability he may have to use routes which are familiar to him on his own, he cannot take advantage of the faculty out of doors without"

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Once more I pay tribute to the work of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who convinced us of the need for an amendment of this sort so that our intentions were clear in the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman was, as ever, an invaluable member of the Committee which considered the Bill. I know that he wanted us to go further in some areas than we have done, but I am sure that he will recognise that the Bill will be of genuine benefit to groups such as the blind and the mentally impaired at whom the amendment is primarily aimed.

We will need to monitor closely how the law is interpreted in practice, but I think that the amendment makes as clear as possible our intentions for the lower rates of the mobility component.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 24 agreed to.

6.30 pm

Clause 6

INTRODUCTION OF DISABILITY WORKING ALLOWANCE

Lords amendment: No. 25, in page 10, line 10, leave out "at least one of the eight weeks" and insert "one or more of the 56 days"

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 26, 27, 29 and 31.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that the Opposition have requested that we debate this group of amendments with Lords amendment No. 28 and their amendment (a), but because Lords amendments Nos. 25, 26, 27, 29 and 31 are all drafting amendments intended to ensure that the Bill has the effect intended, I propose to concentrate on Lords amendment No. 28 and the Opposition's amendment (a). If there are any questions on the other amendments I will return to them at the end of the debate.

Amendment No. 28 clarifies the drafting of clause 6. People who have an income-related benefit and are also receiving a disability premium will satisfy the qualifying benefit test. It was pointed out in Committee that the original drafting appeared to require such people to satisfy additional conditions. That is not our intention. We had a further look at the clause and decided that an amendment was necessary to make that clear.

The power to prescribe the circumstances in which a claimant with an income-related benefit satisfies the qualifying benefit test is necessary because the disability premium is described in regulations rather than in the 1986 Act. The disability working allowance regulations must cross-refer to those.

However, the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) would have a different effect. It would make a small but significant dent in the rule that all DWA claimants must be getting a long-term disability benefit before they claim DWA.

That rule—the qualifying benefit rule—has been debated at length in the House and in another place, and it has been accepted that there are good reasons for keeping the rule intact. In particular, the rule helps us to devise a streamlined method of deciding claims so that people who are entitled to DWA will get their money quickly. That is obviously essential for any benefit which is designed to encourage people to try work.

We have agreed in previous debates on DWA that it is essential that claims should be decided quickly and that claimants should have confidence that the money will be available in a few days. One of the obstacles to speedy administration of claims to disability benefit is the need to establish that the claimant is disabled. We have been able to simplify the test for DWA and to base it to a considerable degree on self-assessment, simply because every recipient will already have passed a disability test in respect of another benefit for long-term sick and disabled people. The simple fact that he or she has qualified for a disability benefit in the past or at the time of applying will establish that a long-term disability is present. In other words, it is a passported benefit. We believe that that is the way to get the money quickly and simply to the claimant.

It is also essential that claimants should understand the conditions and be able to fulfil them easily. I believe that disabled people will welcome being able to do without medical examinations, which have bedevilled so many claims for benefits in the past, and that it will make an enormous difference to speed, efficiency and simplicity.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Minister will not be surprised to learn that we support Lords amendment No. 26 which cuts out any reference to disability premiums on the face of the Bill, but we have our reservations about Lords amendment No. 28, which apparently allows the Government to bring them back through regulations.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for his ingenuity in moving an amendment in lieu which, after 20 years in Parliament, I did not know could be done in respect of Lords amendments. My right hon. Friend has effectively helped us to make our point.

The whole point of amendment (a) is to provide an alternative way of qualifying for the disability working allowance for all disabled people on benefits. The functional test already proposed by the Government to identify whether someone is disabled could also clearly be used for the initial claim of DWA for those disabled people on income support, housing benefit or community charge benefit not receiving the disability premiums.

I stress that that will entail only a minimal amount of extra administration—that was not the objection that the hon. Lady brought forward—because it will simply be applying the standardised test which adjudication officers will already be using, especially when disabled people repeat their claims for DWA every six months.

The amendment will produce consistency throughout the different claiming periods and it will ensure that all disabled people claiming benefits can take advantage of the DWA scheme and will not be allowed to fall through the net.

I am not persuaded by the Minister's argument that the Bill should be preserved as it is simply on grounds of speed. I do not believe that that can justify a rejection of our amendment, but, quite apart from that—I am not persuaded that the procedure could not be speeded up—the real objection is that a lot of disabled people will otherwise fall through the net.

When people claim DWA for the first time, they have to show that they are disabled, provide proof of qualifying for benefit and show that they are at a disadvantage in getting work, all of which we have gone through many times. Unfortunately, one of the main problems is the extremely narrow way in which the term "qualifying benefits" is defined. It is difficult to believe that that is not the reason why the Government are so keen to keep it.

At first sight, it may seem that there is a fairly lengthy list of benefits. It includes those claiming disability living allowance, severe disablement allowance, invalidity benefit and the disability premiums associated with income support, housing benefit, or community charge benefit. However, most people who claim disability premiums are allowed to do so only because they are in receipt of one of the other benefits listed. Given these pretty stringent rules and the enormous pitfalls that there are in defining

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

disadvantage, the Bill as drafted will effectively exclude thousands of disabled people who may otherwise have been helped by the benefit. That is our concern in pressing the amendment.

We believe—this is at the heart of the issue—that the key principle should be that the burden of proof in qualifying for disability working allowance should be whether or not a person is disabled, not whether a potential claimant happens to have the right kind of benefit at the right time.

Other amendments have been proposed throughout the passage of the Bill. We have sought firmly to establish this principle by seeking to include disabled people who are not necessarily claiming these benefits. Unfortunately, our amendments have been repeatedly rejected by the Government on certain grounds. A new ground has been introduced tonight—speed. Furthermore, the question of cost was raised in another place, a point to which I shall return. In addition, reference was made to the anticipated administrative difficulties in defining disability.

The amendment would overcome those problems. It would incur less expense. A disabled person wishing to claim DWA would still have to be in receipt of income support, housing benefit or community charge benefit. It would also be relatively easy to define disability because the functional test, which will already be used for some claimants, could also be applied to those disabled people who do not necessarily have a disability premium.

I repeat that the main point is that the Bill, as drafted, will attract only a very small proportion of disabled people who wish to make the transition from surviving on benefits to employment. The Government's calculation of the potential claimants of DWA—I believe the figure is 50,000—is pretty small compared with their own estimate of the number of disabled people wanting work. The social and community planning research figures, which many people believe are very conservative, show that there are at least 285,000 disabled people wanting work, which is more than five times the number of people who are expected to claim DWA.

There are several categories of people who, if we leave the Bill as it is at the moment, will be left out. I intend to spell out those categories and to ask the Minister to address them. I refer, first, to people who have received incorrect advice and who, therefore, are not receiving disability benefits, even though they are entitled to them. Secondly, there are those people who initially failed to qualify for DWA on income grounds but who, for a number of reasons, have suffered a drop in their income. They may well be entitled to housing benefit, community charge benefit, or even income support, but they will have forfeited their right to a premium. For instance, a person with a fluctuating disability may need to reduce the hours that he or she works. Hence, the earnings would drop. If, however, that person received the premium longer than eight weeks ago, he or she still cannot claim DWA.

Thirdly, there are those people who are in the process of claiming a qualifying benefit but who have not yet received proof of entitlement. The Minister made a point about speed. I make a point about exclusion, which is much more important. For example, this category includes blind people who are waiting for their registration certificate to come through. A fourth category consists of people who do not qualify for the qualifying disability premiums, not because they are not disabled but because the rules for these benefits are so narrowly defined. For example, disability living allowance, which will be one of the main routes to receiving the disability premium, does not necessarily provide for all people with severe disabilities.

I have been circulated—as have, I imagine, other hon. Members—by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It has provided a number of examples, collected from individual citizens advice bureaux, of people who, as the Bill is drafted, will for these reasons be excluded. I intend to refer to a few of them. There is the case of a single man with grand mal epilepsy who had been homeless for over a year. The local authority refused to accept him as being in priority need under the homelessness legislation. He had not obtained work throughout this period because of ill health, but he could have obtained a doctor's sick note declaring him unfit for work in the past 28 weeks—a condition that would have led to him qualifying for the disability premium. The exclusion of homeless people from entitlement to premium meant that this would have been a fruitless exercise. He would have been excluded under the Bill, as drafted.

6.45 pm

Another example is that of a single parent who suffered a serious criminal assault and had to give up work. She was told by her local social security office that she did not have to worry about submitting sick notes because she was a single parent and therefore did not have to sign on as available for work. That meant that until the citizens advice bureau intervened—which I am glad to say it did—she did not receive a disability premium. Therefore, she would have been ineligible to claim disability working allowance.

Those are clear examples, provided by the Spastics Society and NACAB, of significant and important groups of people who will be excluded.

On the question of the functional test, we and many others believe that there is a strong case to be made for the value of self-assessment—in other words, disabled people defining their own disabilities. The Government have proposed a six-month functional test for some people claiming DWA to establish that they are still disabled—and also for a few initial claimants. Surely that test could also be used in the initial claim by disabled people who, for the reasons outlined above, do not have the disability premium. At the moment, a disabled person may well be able to pass the six-month functional test but is unable to claim DWA because he or she does not have the proper qualifying benefits.

I return to my central point: that the situation which I have described is totally illogical. In its present form, the Bill will result in people with similar disabilities being treated completely differently, with one group receiving DWA because they happen to have the right proof at the right time, while others, who are no less disabled, will be prevented from claiming this benefit. Our amendment is designed to remedy that defect.

I expected the Minister to raise my last point—cost. Perhaps I ought to leave it out, since she did not do so. I believe, however, that I ought to refer to cost because the matter was raised by a Government Minister, Lord Henley, in another place. He claimed that the net cost would be about £200 million. Since DWA is supposed to

save the Government money—£10 million a year—I am extremely sceptical as to how that figure is reached. I do not believe that Ministers have given details of how it was calculated.

Our amendment is narrower than previous amendments. It is restricted to people who are already in receipt of means-tested benefits. In some cases, if they are awarded DWA, I should expect their total benefit to be less and in some cases I should expect it to be more, depending on their circumstances and earnings.

Moreover, one of the purposes of DWA—I stress this point to the Minister, since all Ministers have tended to forget it—is to provide short-term rehabilitative help in the transition from employment to full-time work. That is surely the objective of all of us. The net cost of DWA will diminish in that circumstance, in accordance with the success of the rehabilitation. I ask the Minister to comment on the cost. I ask her not only to cost our amendment but also to give the basis of the Government's apparent calculations.

If Lord Henley is right, the huge sum that he mentioned will serve only to show the large number of disabled people who have a disability which puts them at a clear disadvantage in the labour market but who will not be helped by the Bill. That is the clear implication of the sum of £200 million—if Lord Henley is right. That sum is the cost associated with not helping those whom we would help. If the sum is anywhere near £200 million, a substantial number of people must be excluded from the provisions of the Bill.

The amendment is designed to ensure that several thousand disabled people who could have the advantage of DWA are enabled to benefit from it. I do not accept that speed and administration can possibly justify excluding several thousand people who otherwise would be included. On that basis, I hope that the Minister will reconsider the amendment.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I support the amendment to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred. I have some experience of disabled people. For two years before I entered the House last November, I worked for a project in Glasgow by the name of Growing Concern. It sought to put disabled people into employment. The problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West outlined are very real ones. As he said, four fifths of disabled people who want to return to work could be affected. As the Bill is drafted, disability working allowance will not assist those people.

The Growing Concern project covered the whole of Strathclyde region and dealt with a population of 2·5 million people. I had not been involved with disabled people until I joined the project. One thing that I learnt was that emphasis must be put on ability rather than disability. I am worried that the way in which the Bill is worded puts an emphasis on disability and complicates it in a way that will not assist disabled people.

There must be a relationship between the Bill and other legislation. I cannot see such a relationship. For example, under the quota system 3 per cent. of the work force of all major employers should be disabled people. Last week I tabled a parliamentary question to the Scottish Office and was astounded to find that the health service in Scotland achieves only 0·2 per cent. employment of disabled people. That is worse than 10 years ago when it achieved only 0·5 per cent. On top of that we have the spectacle of the Department of Employment awarding Fit for Work awards to major employers for not achieving the quotas. Something could be done about the proportion of disabled people in the work force and I wish to relate that directly to the amendment.

The problem of definition has been highlighted. Disabled people are forced to register in order to qualify for certain benefits or to be assisted by the Department of Employment. The fact that they have to register puts a lot of disabled people off. They do not want to do so. They do not want to carry that label around. That could be simply altered by making people who are eligible to be registered qualify for assistance. The amendment has much the same aim.

Germany has imposed a far higher quota than Britain for several years. There is no escape from the German quota. No one can argue that the quota has damaged the buoyancy of the German economy. If employers do not achieve the quota, they must sub-contract a proportion of their work. If they do not do so, they must pay money to a national rehabilitation fund. Or the employer can do a combination of those things. There is no escape. The quota does not affect competition in Germany. Many disabled people, like everyone else, would swap the economy of Germany for that of Britain, even with the troubles that Germany has been through.

Even more importantly, there is a great untapped resource of disabled people who have the potential to make a contribution to the community and to lead a better quality of life than they are allowed to lead at present. The Bill misses out four fifths of them. As a result of marginal tax relief, people could lose 96p in the pound.

I shall bring my remarks to a conclusion because I am aware that we are short of time. I stress that if one word is important to disabled people, it is the same word as is important to us all. It is "dignity". All disabled people should be brought within the provisions of the Bill. They should not have to register and meet several conditions. I do not accept the Minister's argument that without the amendment implementation will be quicker. Unless the suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West are adopted, the measure will be to the disadvantage of many disabled people and their dignity, but, above all, it will leave an untapped pool of talent in our disabled community.

Miss Widdecombe: This has been an interesting debate and several important points have been raised. The crucial aim of disability working allowance is to help people who are trying to transfer from incapacity to work. The incapacity must be one which prevents the person from working or does so to an extent that would normally be recognised as reasonable for an able-bodied person. DWA is not about disability per se. It is not about whether someone is deaf or blind, but about whether, as a result of those disabilities, he or she is unable to work. That is the crucial point.

First, we should make it clear that a large range of benefits—of which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) mentioned only a few—act as qualifying benefits or passports to DWA. They are invalidity benefit, severe disability allowance or a disability premium in income support, housing benefit or community charge benefit, disability living allowance—if the claimant is in receipt of it—an analogous benefit such as constant

[Miss Widdecombe]

attendance allowance in the war pensions and industrial injuries scheme, attendance allowance for those over 65, mobility allowance for claims made in the four weeks before A day or the allowances given to people who have an invalid carriage or car under the National Health Service Act 1977. We have sought to build a comprehensive range of qualifying benefits.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West raised several specific points. The first was the functional disability test. He suggested that what we are devising for repeat claims could be used for initial claims. We shall send a short questionnaire to about 40 per cent. of people who claim a further award. Such people will mostly be those who were receiving invalidity benefit before they claimed DWA and who have not passed a disability test for another benefit recently. But they will all be people who at one time had a long-term illness or disability which was recognised by such a benefit. That fact has been taken into account in devising the questionnaire. I am not convinced that the test that we have devised for people who have at some time had a long-term illness would be suitable for anyone who happened to be on an income-related benefit.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West also raised an important point about people who have a claim in progress which has not yet been assessed. I understand that, in their case, if the claim is ultimately decided in their favour, DWA will be backdated to the date of the claim.

As the hon. Member for Oldham, West said, some income support claimants cannot qualify for the disability premium. Homeless people do not receive premiums. People in residential care and nursing homes have their benefit calculated in a special way. But most people will probably satisfy the qualifying benefit test in a different way because they are already getting DLA.

I believe that it would be a complex business to devise rules to ensure that anyone with a theoretical entitlement to a premium, but no actual entitlement, could claim DWA. Potentially, large numbers of people on income-related benefits who had never established an entitlement to a disability premium could ask to be assessed. To be assessed when there is no automatic passport would mean a medical assessment. It would mean a detailed examination of the individual's circumstances. There is no way in which that could be done speedily or efficiently. It would take a very long time, not only in administrative terms, but in terms of establishing that the claim was justified. That is the very thing that we have to avoid. I should not like to see the very efficient system that we have built in here corrupted in any way by a long-term, cumbersome, difficult procedure which a medical assessment of somebody who had never before established an entitlement to a disability premium would involve if there should be claims on any scale.

In that connection, I turn to the final point that was raised by the hon. Member for Oldham, West—the cost. Obviously we cannot say that there is a definitive cost. With any new benefit, we can only make calculations. We are not talking here about people with flu; we are talking about long-term disablement, about poeple with problems arising from incapacity for work. If they did not have to demonstrate incapacity through recognition in respect of a previous benefit, there would be potentially a very large number of claimants, with all that that would involve in terms of administrative cost, quite apart from the benefits themselves if they became payable.

Amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 28 would not be helpful. It would probably result in a very much more complicated and slow procedure than the one that we have devised, which is efficient and quick, and recognises, without any question or any further need to establish a claim, the right of anybody who has already established an entitlement to disability benefit.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to, some with Special Entry.

Committee appointed to draw up reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 3 to the Bill; Mr. Graham Allen, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Michael Meacher, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Irvine Patnick, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Miss Ann Widdecombe; three to be the quorum.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Community Charges

7.1 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move,

That the draft Charge Limitation (England) (Maximum Amounts) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 16 May, be approved.

This order is the final piece of business relating to local authorities' budget cycle for 1991-92. It signifies that we have reached the end of this year's capping round.

I make no apology for our having used our capping powers. Part of the Government's responsibility for the management of the economy is the duty to control public expenditure, of which more than a quarter is spending by local authorities. We also have a clear duty to protect local tax payers from unacceptably high bills. If we had not used our capping powers, we should rightly have been open to the criticism that we were shirking our duties.

Opposition Members say, "What about local accountability?" They say, "Let the councils themselves decide whatever spending level they wish"—a rare example of a laissez-faire approach by the Opposition.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: It is very early in my speech, but I will give way.

Mr. Fraser: Introducing the Local Government Finance Bill 1987, the then Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"These proposals are fundamentally to restore local democracy."

He also said:

"Whatever the figure, voters will know that it reflects the decision on spending which their council has made on their behalf."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1118-26.]

Why did he say that?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's constituents, who bear the highest community charge in the land, believe that local democracy for them means the right of their council to charge them far more than most of them can afford. The people of Lambeth look to the Government to offer them some protection against a very high community charge. The hon. Gentleman and his Labour colleague from Lambeth half believe that themselves, although they may not wish to say so today.

The facts speak for themselves. We had the highest hopes that increased accountability would lead to sensible and prudent budgeting by all local authorities. It is a disappointment that, in the event, this has not proved to be the case.

In 1990-91, authorities used the change to the new system as a smokescreen to disguise vastly increased expenditure. Spending rose by 13·5 per cent., and over the two-year period to April 1991 spending rose by more than a quarter. In 1991, authorities overspent by more than £3 billion beyond what we provided for in the settlement. Such staggering increases in council spending cannot be justified. We have acted this year to prevent a repetition —and let no one doubt that we shall act again if necessary.

In the future, the risk of overspending might be even greater, given the fundamental and permanent shift from local to national taxation for the funding of local services that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget with the switch to VAT. We have made it clear that we intend broadly to maintain the same balance between national and local moneys in future years. We are determined to ensure that the very substantial extra money that we are providing to local authorities is not frittered away in higher spending but continues to be used to keep charges down to reasonable levels.

That is why we have announced today that we shall soon seek stronger capping powers to bring authorities' budgeting below £15 million per year, into the scope of capping, should they budget excessively. Even this year's experience shows the need for that change. In the case of a district such as Derwentside, with a budget below £15 million, overspending added £83 to the charge this year; and in Harlow—another district budgeting below £15 million—overspending added £68 to the charge.

This year we have acted to achieve as much as possible by deterrence, and as little as possible by actual capping. Last year many authorities, including many Labour authorities, suggested to us that they should be told before making their budgeting decisions what capping criteria we intended to use. I was very grateful for that suggestion, and this year we did just that—we did precisely what authorities asked of us.

In October last year my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the then Secretary of State for the Environment, announced the provisional criteria for selecting authorities for capping that he intended to adopt. Therefore, before authorities came to set their budgets, they knew our intentions for capping. If they budgeted excessively and were subsequently capped, they did so with their eyes open to the consequences. That approach worked. Of the 39 county councils, 37 budgeted below the intended criteria. Of the 36 metropolitan districts, 35 budgeted below the criteria. Of the 33 London boroughs, 31 budgeted below the intended criteria. That is a measure of how, where authorities have the will and the commitment, efficient and effective services can be provided within prudent levels of spending.

The result is that, in total, local authority spending this year is just £200 million or 0·5 per cent. above the £39 billion for which we provided in our settlement. What a contrast that is to the £3 billion-worth of overspending in the previous year.

None the less, despite all the warnings, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State judged that 14 authorities had budgeted excessively or had budgeted for an excessive increase over the previous year. He reached that view on the basis of the same capping criteria which he adopted and which gave effect to the intentions announced in October. On 3 April he therefore designated those 14 authorities for capping and proposed caps or maximum limits for their budgets.

The principles adopted were, and were intended to be, demanding. We do not apologise for that. But I stress that no council is designated if its budget is at or below its standard spending assessment. To those who allege inadequacies in calculating the SSAs, I point out that we have increased the SSAs in 1991-92 by an average of 19·4 per cent. over those of 1990-91 to give total standard spending of £39 billion. Events have borne out our view that that amount is fully sufficient to provide for local authority services.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): In defending standard spending assessments, will the Minister explain them to the people of Cornwall, who saw an authority that was always judged to be an under-spender suddenly become an over-spender one year, and then, this year, become an under-spender again, despite having spent more? Such arbitrary changes inevitably mean that local councillors, council officers, and people in general can only laugh at the way the system appears to have become complete nonsense.

Mr. Portillo: Is the hon. Gentleman referring to Cornwall county council?

Mr. Taylor *indicated assent.*

Mr. Portillo: It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman is asking us to believe that whatever a council chooses to spend in any one year is the measure of what it needs to spend. The Government set out to identify the spending needs of councils by more independent and objective means. In the event, last year spending increased by much more than the Government would have wished. We deplore that, but what were we to do? Were we to ignore the fact that the increase had occurred or to make some allowance for it in the standard spending assessment for the following year? The hon. Gentleman should welcome the fact that we went so far in providing additional SSA to reflect what had already happened.

For those authorities which had been designated, we proposed caps taking account of all the information available to us. I emphasise that our aim was that where authorities were able to reduce their budgets by the full amount implied by the criteria, they should be required to do just that.

The designated councils were notified on 3 April of their designation, of the principles on the basis of which they had been designated and of the amount of our proposed cap. They then had a period of 28 days in which to tell us whether they accepted the proposed cap. If they challenged it, they had to suggest an alternative figure, together with a supporting case.

In the event, six authorities—Greenwich, Langbaurgh, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Reading and Somerset—accepted the proposed caps. The remaining eight challenged, and it is the final caps for those authorities that are dealt with in the draft order before the House. Of those eight, all but Stoke-on-Trent suggested alternative caps at the level of their original budgets. Stoke put forward a cap £0·5 million above its original budget.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My hon. Friend has listed both my local authorities among those which have been capped and have accepted the capping, but I must tell him that the criteria used to produce SSAs, which he may describe in the House as independent and objective, do not appear so to those closer to the scene.

The county of Cleveland, in which both my local authorities lie, spends money as though it were going out of existence. It has just produced, as though out of a hat, £860,000 to waste on a public relations exercise. Yet the two district authorities, especially Langbaurgh, are treated extremely badly under the SSAs and come right at the bottom every year. It seems that once an authority gets to the bottom, it stays there. I do not believe that that is independent, fair or just. The Conservative-controlled authority has accepted the capping this year, but I hope that, by next year, the SSAs will not be set in tablets of stone, but will be considered objectively and fairly.

Mr. Portillo: I hope always to be objective and fair in considering arguments put to me on the standard spending assessment. I should have had a little more sympathy with my hon. Friend if the two local authorities that he mentioned had been close to the SSAs—if one could have said they were within a whisker of them—but Langbaurgh proposed a budget 36·3 per cent. above its SSA, and Middlesbrough a budget 21·9 per cent. above its SSA. Even the caps that the authorities have accepted are more than 30 per cent. above that level in the case of Langbaurgh and 17·5 per cent. above it in the case of Middlesbrough. Doubtless during the coming year my hon. Friend and I will discuss the matter further, and I look forward to that.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the purpose of capping is to achieve value for money for the charge payer? Does not the fact that councils can honour the capping agreement and can cap budgets without cutting essential services or even staff show that there is much fat still in many district and metropolitan authorities and in county councils?

Mr. Portillo: It is certainly a source of great satisfaction to me that this year, by following the principle of deterrence and asking authorities in advance to reduce their own budgets, we have had to cap so very few local authorities. It seems to have been possible, despite much agitation, for most authorities to set budgets that fit in with our criteria.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and I met delegations from each of the eight authorities in support of their written cases for a reduced cap. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State carefully considered the points made at these meetings, with all the other available relevant information, before taking his decisions. In the case of four authorities—Basildon, Ipswich, Norwich and Stoke-on-Trent—he decided that their caps should be set at the level originally proposed. For the remaining four—Bristol, Lambeth, Warwickshire and Wirral—he decided, in the light of their particular circumstances, that some relaxation was justified. As a result, we have decided to increase the caps for those authorities by £1·5 million, £3·9 million, £2·8 million and £3·2 million respectively.

Throughout the exercise we have had but one aim—to require a capped authority to reduce its budget to a level such that it would no longer be excessive or represent an excessive increase. Wherever authorities are able to make that maximum reduction—however tough and demanding it may be—we have required it of them. Only in cases where the circumstances of the authority itself are such that we could not, within this year, demand that of the authority have we decided to aim off and require smaller reductions.

I should make it clear that, in those cases where we have decided to grant an increase in the cap over our originally proposed level, we have done so only after the most searching scrutiny of each authority's circumstances. There is no question of it being an easy ride for an authority seeking a higher cap.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that the caps for each of the eight authorities stated in the

draft order are reasonable, appropriate and achievable in the light of all the circumstances of the authorities concerned. If the House approves the order today, it will then be for the authorities to decide how to live within their caps.

I have no doubt that we shall hear a great deal from the Opposition about the effects of capping, but I am equally sure that they will succumb to the temptation to indulge in the usual hyperbole and exaggeration that has characterised so many debates on this issue in the past. We are satisfied that councils, if they so choose, will be able to provide an appropriate level of services within their caps. If hon. Members ask what happened in 1990-91, I will remind them. I can do no better than quote from a survey carried out by the National Association of Local Government Officers. Last year, in the case of Basildon, NALGO reported:

"no cuts required as a result of capping."

In the case of Bristol last year, NALGO reported:

"no redundancies, no cuts in services, no charge increases."

And on Lambeth, NALGO reported:

"managed to avoid closure of front-line services and no redundancies."

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): In the case of Norwich, which is included in the order, the city council has made great play of possible damage to historic buildings, a cut in programmes to help those buildings, and so on. Will my hon. Friend confirm that Norwich city council has adequate money in its reserves to deal with those problems and therefore that its fears are exaggerated, and indeed false, in that respect?

Mr. Portillo: I understand that at the end of March 1990 Norwich held reserves of £3·9 million. My hon. Friend's authority is not the only one to face costs in relation to historic buildings, and Norwich has a higher standard spending assessment per adult than Exeter, Winchester, Hereford, St. Albans, Lincoln or Warwick. Yet all those authorities, despite their historic buildings, are budgeting below their SSA. Meanwhile, Norwich was planning to budget at £16·5 million—25 per cent. above its SSA.

In 1991-92 we find some old friends still budgeting well in excess of their SSA. In Basildon, the original budget was an extraordinary 121·2 per cent. above the SSA, although we might breathe a sigh of relief as the original budget for 1990-91 was 196 per cent. above SSA. Other local authorities also budgeted high. Bristol budgeted 44·5 per cent. above SSA. I do not need to tell the House that those are very far from meagre amounts and they mean important amounts on the community charge. It is difficult to envisage that any of the designated authorities could not be expected to make savings to reduce their excessive spending.

Among the familiar faces there are also some new ones. Ipswich, for example, set a budget 50 per cent. above SSA. Last year Ipswich escaped designation owing to the operation of the de minimis proviso even though its budget was 96·3 per cent. above SSA. This year we decided not to loosen the criteria by the inclusion of a de minimis proviso beyond an allowance of £10,000 for those authorities whose arithmetic was imperfect.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): The Minister has referred to Ipswich. Will he also comment on and explain his decision in relation to Stoke-on-Trent, where the spending level that the council planned was more than £5 million below the level that his officials said was the right level of expenditure for last year? How does he explain how a figure that was correct for last year is far too high for this year, with the same social problems being faced by our city?

Mr. Portillo: The Stoke-on-Trent authority has the highest SSA per adult of all the authorities in Staffordshire, yet six of the districts in Staffordshire have budgeted within their much lower SSAs. Stoke is constantly making comparisons with other authorities, but it gets 13 per cent. more SSA per adult than Warrington, for example, which manages to stay within its SSA while Stoke's budget is £18 per adult above its SSA.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Talking about arithmetic being imperfect, I wonder whether my hon. Friend is aware that the Labour leader of Basildon council, councillor Peter Ballard, is apparently a qualified accountant working for the Labour party at its headquarters in the Walworth road. Perhaps that is part of the reason why its budgets do not balance either.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is a veritable fount of information, but I am bound to say that, although in setting the caps I took into account all relevant information, the point that she has just made was not one that I took into account.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether you have received a copy of a letter from Mr. Peter Ballard of Basildon district council, which has been circulated among hon. Members this evening and in which he makes an urgent plea on behalf of his local authority because he is faced with having to cut services for the elderly and for young people, recreational facilities and a great number of facilities which are enjoyed by the general public.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It is already clear to me that that is a matter for debate, not a point of order for the Chair. Mr. Portillo.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I give way to the hon. Lady.

Ms. Walley: On the point that the Minister has just raised about comparisons with other cities, will he not accept that we are making valid comparisons between our city and other major cities? How does he account to the House for the fact that, for example, Leicester city council has a budget spend of £237 per head of population, while our budget per head of population in Stoke-on-Trent is £128? He says that it is useless to make comparisons, but surely these figures do not square up. Stoke-on-Trent is as large and important a city as Leicester. Ours is one of the larger district councils. If Leicester can hold a budget of that kind, what is wrong with Stoke-on-Trent doing so? Why has the Minister got it in for Stoke-on-Trent? Why can he not give the amount of money that is needed to provide local services?

Mr. Portillo: I certainly do not have it in for Stoke-on-Trent. We try to assess the needs of each city not merely on the basis of how large it is or whether intuitively we think that it is like other cities, but in terms of a series of indicators which tell us whether it is more expensive to provide particular services in that city—indicators relating to social make-up, how many people are on income

[Mr. Portillo]

support, what the proportions of people from ethnic minorities are, how many one-parent families there are. Those are factors which tend to make it more expensive to provide services—education, leisure, refuse collection, public amenities, and so on—in authorities such as the hon. Lady's.

To show that we are in no way mistreating Stoke-on-Trent, I remind the hon. Lady that in a number of programmes Stoke-on-Trent does extremely well. For example, its housing investment programme allocation was £17·7 million last year, and a further £14·5 million this year. So there are ways in which Stoke-on-Trent does extremely well—*[Interruption.]* The House would like me to make progress; I think that that is right.

In conclusion, I reiterate——

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: I will give way, but for the last time.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend has refered to some very large increases beyond the SSAs of many authorities. Having put forward those figures, he can perhaps understand the concern in Warwickshire. Last year its spending was some 10 per cent. above the SSA figure and this year it put forward a budget about 5 per cent. above. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand how Warwickshire feels. Compared with other authorities, it is not profligate in any sense.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend knows, following frequent discussions, that we have considered Warwickshire's case carefully. We propose an increase in the cap, but our proposal leaves Warwickshire's spending 3·6 per cent. above its SSA.

I reiterate the Government's responsibility to protect charge payers from the consequences of excessive expenditure by local authorities in terms of unacceptably high bills, and to ensure that individual authorities cannot, for whatever reason, endanger our wider economic objectives to the detriment of all.

Our approach to capping this year has been entirely vindicated. We shall not tolerate a repetition of the enormous increase in local authority expenditure which accompanied the introduction of the community charge. We have shown that our policy works by telling councils well in advance the levels of spending and the levels of increase that we would regard as excessive. Most of them have fallen into line without the need to cap. That is how we shall limit spending, and that is how we shall ensure that we can deliver the council tax at reasonable levels.

The Labour party proposes no restraint on local spending, which means that such spending would go through the roof. That is why the Labour party's figures for the rates to which it would return are not worth the paper on which they are written.

I have great pleasure in commending the draft order to the House.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House is shocked at reports that Rajiv Gandhi has been assassinated and I wonder whether arrangements could be made for the Government to make a suitable statement, perhaps at 10 pm, to enable the entire House to express its sympathy with Mr. Gandhi's family and with all the people of India, and to express the hope that Indian democracy will overcome this dreadful challenge. A statement would enable us all to call for calm among the Indian community in the United Kingdom and throughout the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am sure that the entire House will echo the hon. Member's words. The news has left us all with a sense of deep shock. I have heard nothing about a statement, but I am sure that the hon. Member's comments will be noted by those who sit on the Government Front Bench.

7.32 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) in expressing on behalf of the Opposition—I am sure that I speak for all in this place—the shock and horror that we feel on receiving such tragic news from India.

It is a measure of the extent to which the Government are assailed by difficulties on all sides—difficulties with the national health service, with the economy, with Europe and with education, and not only from outside their ranks but within them, too—that they are reduced to trying to grasp at the straw of claiming that at least with local government finance they have managed to wriggle off the hook on which they impaled themselves. However, even that modest claim can scarcely be justified. The truth is not that concern over the poll tax has subsided but that concern about other issues has increased. The real damage that was done to the Government by the poll tax debacle was to their reputation for competence. It is that competence which is now called into question throughout the range of Government policy on all other issues. It is the Government who could not get the poll tax right who now look so much less convincing on other issues.

Nor is it true that the poll tax saga is over. The Government may at last have steeled themselves to acknowledging that a terrible mistake has been made. However, they have done their reputation no good by dithering over what to do and by their continuing inability to get rid of the poll tax.

The Government's difficulties will become worse. Political commentators may assume that the poll tax fury has subsided, but they have not seen my mail bag over the past week or two nor, I suspect, the mail bags of many Conservative Members. Equally, commentators have not been present at my advice surgeries. I am sure that other hon. Members have detected a clear message from these sources. There is a rising tide of anger among many people who are beginning to discover, as this year's poll tax bills arrive, that they have been taken for a ride over the supposed £140 reduction in their bills. They are already paying a poll tax surcharge in the form of value added tax. Typically enough, half all poll tax payers, and especially those at the lower end of the scale, will not benefit from the full and promised reduction.

That is only the beginning of the troubles. It is starting to dawn on people that the abolition of the hated poll tax is still a long time away. The bills will keep on coming until 1993, according to the Government. According to most experts, the bills will continue to be presented until at least 1994, and possibly until 1996, according to the view of local government treasurers as reported in this week's issue of *Local Government News*. Anger will grow as it becomes clear that every year of the continued life of the poll tax

will preserve all of the tax's unfairness and inflexibility and will cost each household, on average, £140 more than it would have to pay under the Opposition's fair rates proposals.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): What would someone living in a house worth £100,000 in my constituency pay under the Labour party's fair rates proposal?

Mr. Gould: I advise the hon. Gentleman to consult the full table that sets out the rates that would be paid under our proposals.

Mr. Jones: They are not set out.

Mr. Gould: Oh yes they are. The figures are set out for a household with a property of average rateable value. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the figures bear close scrutiny. They are based on real figures, not on a 14-band exercise that required district valuers simply to make estimates. That exercise was then translated by lopping off the six top bands and rearranging the remaining eight into seven bands that bear no relationship to any exercise that has ever been carried out.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Gould: No, I shall not give way. I believe that I have dealt substantially and conclusively with the disputed figures.

Each year's continuance of the poll tax can only add to the problem of accountability. I know that the House is not normally disposed to take these matters seriously, but I invite it and all those who are concerned with local government to do so. Imagine the difficulty of collecting the poll tax. The problem is clear in Scotland, where it is becoming greater rather than easier. The problem will be exacerbated over two, three or perhaps four years by a perception that even the poll tax's only remaining friend, the Government, have abandoned it. There will be the further perception, assiduously propagated by Government propaganda, that the tax has somehow been abolished. The problem or the outlook for local government treasurers in trying to collect the poll tax in such circumstances is truly horrific.

It seems that the Government have been so preoccupied with the short-term political question of how to get themselves off the poll tax hook that we must assume that they have not yet bothered to consider the longer-term practical problems that their measures have produced. I urge Ministers, for the sake of local government, to pay some attention to the issues.

We have to consider the Government's capping measures in that context of uncertainty and confusion, which is exacerbated by today's announcement of yet further legislation intended to turn the capping screw even tighter.

It is fair to say that the Government have found it necessary—perhaps against the better instincts of some Ministers—to cling to the rock of capping for fear of being swept away in the sea of confusion which they have created over local government finance. Even in the field of capping there is nothing but confusion and inconsistency.

On this issue, as on so many other local government finance issues, we have been treated by the Secretary of State—how regretable it is that he is not present—to an increasingly weary and familiar spectacle of him standing on his head, not once but 10 times over. He has a long record of being consistent only in his inconsistency on all those issues.

On 18 July 1979, when the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for the Environment for the first time, he promised to set councils free. He said:

"We will sweep away tiresome and excessive control over local government. Local councils are directly elected. They are answerable to their electorate. They do not need, they do not want, the fussy supervision of detail which now exists."

What fine sentiments and how much we Opposition Members agree with him. Fine sentiments, which were almost immediately obstructed in practice by a Secretary of State who did more to impose central Government control on local government finance than any other Minister in history.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once already.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I may well give way, but I shall complete this argument before I do so. The Secretary of State introduced grant targets and penalties which led directly to rate capping in 1984.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Once I have dealt with the Secretary of State I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. He may have to remind me again if I overlook him.

At the end of the decade, and out of Marsham street, the Secretary of State had recanted. He wrote in *The Times* on 10 May 1990 that to introduce universal capping would be to negate accountability and would be

"an act of centralised power outside our experience. On those grounds alone"—

he proclaimed—

"it should be resisted."

But here is the Secretary of State—in spirit if not in person—not resisting capping but enthusiastically supporting it all over again. Here is a Secretary of State whose first act when he took up the reins of office again at the end of last year was to pursue a capping measure, a Secretary of State who has again introduced in his name today's measure and who gave a written answer to one of his hon. Friends announcing that further capping measures will be taken. It is little wonder that politicians, especially the Secretary of State, are frequently not believed and that the Secretary of State's reputation for honesty and principle is now in tatters. If he were present I would challenge him to say, here and now, whether he adheres to the view that he expressed a year ago. If he said that he did, I would ask him why he is acting in the contrary direction. If he said that he did not, I would ask him what had made him change his mind.

I am tempted to ask the Minister of State to explain on behalf of the Secretary of State, because he is clearly a man of some facility in following the twists and turns of his superior's thinking in these matters. But that might be unfair, even to the Minister.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that any future Labour Government will abolish capping and spending limits? Will he also confirm that his co-called fair

[Mr. Oppenheim]

rates figures were based on this year's spending, which obviously involved an element of lower spending because of capping and spending limits? If that is so, how can his so-called fair rates figures be taken seriously?

Mr. Gould: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman simply does not understand these matters. We have established our position on capping on many occasions. Let us make it clear that our proposals for doubling the tax base, for rearranging the grant and for annual elections are a better and more democratic means of achieving the limits in local authority spending which we think appropriate.

Our fair rates figures are based entirely on like with like. We have accepted the same level of spending as the Government have established.

Mr. Portillo: I was intrigued by the phrase that the hon. Gentleman used a moment ago, when he said that it was a better way of achieving the limits which he thought "appropriate" on local government spending. What are those limits and why has he not told us about them before?

Mr. Gould: Because they are the limits that are decided as appropriate by local authorities, which are answerable to their electorate. That is a familiar principle to anyone who claims to believe in the principle of local democracy. I know that it is difficult for Ministers and Conservative Members to grasp that simple concept, but that is the essence of local democracy; and because we intend to strengthen it through our proposals for annual elections, we believe that we have a persuasive programme for ensuring that local electors are able to judge regularly and effectively the level of spending and levels of service which they decide that they want delivered for that spending.

There is a suspicion that the Secretary of State's reason for abandoning his earlier and better judgment on these matters and proceeding with these draconian proposals to cap local authorities was not that he was suddenly persuaded, in some deathbed conversion, of the great merits of capping, but that he was told it would be politically advantageous to use a capping mechanism, which it was hoped would corral and identify Labour authorities so that they could be uniquely accused of overspending.

Unfortunately, the exercise proved more difficult than it had seemed at first sight, and it proved impossible to come up with an objective set of criteria which identified Labour authorities only and excluded Conservative-controlled authorities. Try as they might, the Government could not perform that exercise. Today's announcement shows that they have abandoned any attempt to proclaim and protect the last vestiges of local government independence in matters of finance and that they are prepared to threaten large numbers of Tory-controlled administrations as well. Let us make no mistake: that is what universal capping will mean. As soon as the £15 million threshold is removed, large numbers of smaller Tory districts will be brought into the net. On this year's figures, no fewer than 20 Tory-controlled districts would have been capped under the criteria applied for this year. Elmbridge in Surrey would have had to cut 38 per cent. of its budget, Oadby and Wigston would have been capped to the tune of 19·7 per cent.—although the voters have intervened in the meantime—Arun by 18·3 per cent. and Epping Forest by 17 per cent. I could continue down the list.

Mr. Stevens *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Deep cuts in services would have been needed to accommodate that exercise of the capping power, as I am sure the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) is about to say was true in Warwickshire this year.

Mr. Stevens: How many Labour councils, under the £15 million limit this year, would have been capped in the process?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me for concentrating on the large number of Tory authorities which figure in these small districts. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have considerable fellow feeling for them, given his spirited defence of Warwickshire a moment ago.

The capping exercise is arbitrary in another respect—the criteria for capping are based in part on the Government's calculations of standard spending assessment, which everyone knows bears little relationship to levels of expenditure and is substantially flawed, as is shown by the experience of a large number of authorities such as Greenwich. I notice that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) was anxious to suggest one or two other instances for consideration.

Some authorities, such as Basildon and Bristol, found themselves capped because of the arbitrary nature of the criteria, even though they did not exceed their SSAs—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am sorry; they found themselves capped because they had exceeded their SSAs but had reduced their budgets from one year to the next. That means that excessive weight is placed on that arbitrary criterion. Because the standard spending assessments of many authorities, such as Stoke, had been reduced from one year to the next, they were suddenly and unpredictably caught by the draconian nature of the capping powers that have been exercised.

Mrs Gorman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government allowed Basildon to increase its spending by 27 per cent. over last year so they have been more generous to Basildon this year? As Basildon was asking to spend over 191 per cent. more than it should have spent, the Government have been inordinately generous to it.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Lady should be clear about the distinction between changes in SSAs and the budget.

Conversely, the other criterion, based on the extent to which last year's budget is exceeded, has caught some authorities, such as Wirral, which has inherited budgets that have been held artificially low by previous administrations in earlier years. The arbitrary nature of those criteria is shown by the fact that, of the authorities that have appealed, 50 per cent. have had their capping levels changed. I do not object to the outcome of those appeals which, in themselves, are welcome. However, the fact that half the caps did not fit is a clear indication of how unreliable the capping criteria are.

Those measures are all taken to trim less than £40 million, or 0·1 per cent., off local government expenditure. That is only a fifth of the extra expenditure forced on local authorities by the Government through their hasty and last-minute move away from the poll tax and in favour of VAT. It is costing local authorities £200 million to recalculate and reissue those bills. We hear little about the Government being capped on those grounds.

That is a further illustration of a wider truth: the best judges of local authority finance and of the services that it

delivers are the local authorities themselves and the communities that they serve and to which they are accountable. The Secretary of State made that point eloquently just a year ago, and it should be apparent to anyone who genuinely believes in local democracy. If local people decide that they want——

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I am halfway through a point that I am trying to make. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

If local people want, and are willing to pay for, a new nature reserve, better nursery provision or more low-cost housing, why should not they be able to vote for those changes and their delivery? That is what local democracy is about and it is being denied by the Government.

Sir William Shelton: Does the hon. Gentleman persist in saying that he would let Lambeth council spend whatever it wished? The hon. Gentleman talks of local democracy, but is it not true that his party has dispossessed 13 councillors, elected by the people of Lambeth, and has made them resign their seats from the Labour party? Am I not right that the main reason was that those councillors had a debate on the Iraq war and were rather in favour of Saddam Hussein? Moreover, some of them did not pay their community charge, exactly like some Labour Members.

Mr. Gould: I am sorry to be harsh with the hon. Gentleman, but I am always astonished that Conservative Members take the trouble to come into the Chamber, presumably to make a contribution, and then reveal their abysmal ignorance of the subject on which they choose to intervene. The truth is that the Lambeth councillors are still councillors and I recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads our proposals for annual elections and a quality commission, in which he will see that we have a complete programme for some of the problems that have arisen in Lambeth.

The Government's use of capping has virtually extinguished any remnant of true local democracy. Every aspect of local authority finance is now controlled from Marsham street, from the constraints on capital spending to the nationalised business rate, from the level of SSA and essential Government grants to the threat and reality of capping which, under the Government's new measure, will dictate to every local authority the size of the budget that they must set.

Ministers seem insensitive to the charge that they are thereby destroying local government. They appear to understand little and to care less. They preen themselves on having held down budgets and spending programmes, with no regard to the real damage that they have done to local services and to the people who depend on them. I suspect that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), who has some experience in his constituency of what those cuts mean, would, at least behind the scenes, agree with me.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene again. However, I do not agree with his latter point. Although I disagree with the Government over standard spending assessments, the inefficiency of Langbaurgh council is a byword. Indeed, its civic amenity has a bar with no financial controls, not even a till roll in the till. Until such matters are put right, Langbaurgh council is not a good example to pick.

Mr. Gould: How refreshing it is to hear a Tory Member who is at least prepared to make honest comments about a Conservative-dominated administration. The hon. Gentleman would agree with the general proposition and the principle——

Mr. Holt: No.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman well knows that a Conservative budget was put forward.

Mr. Holt: No, it was not.

Mr. Gould: Yes, it was. It is clear that we shall not resolve this issue, but the hon. Gentleman will concede——

Mr. Holt: I must put this on the record yet again in the House. The largest party on Langbaurgh council was the Labour party. For some reason, four members of the Labour party defected and became independent. The Liberals then switched their support from the Labour party to the Conservative party, but, every time a budget proposal was put forward by the Conservative party, it was voted down by the Liberal and Labour parties together.

Mr. Gould: The House will conclude from that intervention that the hon. Gentleman does not dispute the fact that the Conservative party took the chair of the committee and a Conservative party budget was eventually voted through.

Let us make no mistake: whatever the truth of the position in Langbaurgh—which the hon. Gentleman may or may not be prepared to reveal—the Government's capping measures and the threat to use them have caused substantial damage and hardship to nursery school provision, lunch clubs for old people, legal, housing and welfare rights, advice centres, leisure and library facilities, youth clubs and the whole voluntary sector, which is the means by which so much local effort is made effective in the local community.

Ministers should not claim that those cuts were painless. They have hurt services and local people notice that damage and those cuts. Those measures could have been perpetrated only by a Government who, if they ever understood and valued local government, certainly do not do so now. There is little point in challenging Ministers on what they believe about those issues. They have shown beyond doubt that they have no beliefs to which they are prepared to adhere. Those Ministers continued to proclaim the great virtues of the poll tax until they were told to jump in another direction and then duly did so. They have not only no sense of principle or consistency but no sense of shame either. They are prepared to follow their Secretary of State in humiliating reversals and clear about-faces, in flat contradiction of their own personally stated positions. The Ministers act not on what they think or believe, but according to what, from day to day, appears to them to serve the interests of their own immediate short-term electoral fortunes. The evidence is that the electorate is as sickened by the spectacle as we are and will impose the appropriate penalty as soon as the general election is held.

8 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) along his last electioneering path, but will instead return to the subject of the debate and follow on from the remarks that I made in last year's debate on capping. I said then that the decision on whether the Government should cap was effectively determined by Bristol city council through its decision—which was the council's decision alone—to impose on the city a budget far beyond that which people could afford.

In order to explore one of the reasons which justify the Government yet again rescuing the long-suffering citizens of Bristol from the waste and jobbery that are now inseparable from Bristol city council, I shall concentrate on one aspect of the council's inflated budget—the way it sets about collecting public money.

Undoubtedly, the most resented part of the council's community charge announcement for the current year was that the community charge for Bristol included a sum of £40 for every charge payer to cover the costs of non-collection. That sum alone amply justifies a far more savage cap on the community charge than that imposed by the Government. That does not take account of other spending which, in the previous year, led Bristol to announce net revenue expenditure of about 185 per cent. of its standard spending assessment.

A study of Bristol's system for collecting the community charge shows that the problem goes much deeper than irresponsible overspending. This year, the collection losses in Bristol on both community charge and rates averaged £10 per adult. The average figure for comparable authorities was £7. Last year, the cost of collecting the community charge and administering community charge benefits in Bristol was £19.90 per adult. The figure for comparable authorities was £11·30.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I think I can help out here and correct the hon. Gentleman, who I am sure got his figures from the city treasurer. He is right to say that the estimated cost for the collection of Bristol's poll tax for the year was £19·90, but the probable outturn, which is based on the cost, is £14·65. The cost per head in the big 11 and the metropolitan authorities, which are comparable to Bristol, is £15 per head. Therefore, Bristol is bang on the Government target.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who quotes the city treasurer's figures, which have also been quoted to me. I am quoting the Audit Commission's figures, and while there is room for a difference of opinion between——

Ms. Primarolo: The treasurer's figures are based on the Audit Commission's figures. The hon. Gentleman should not be silly.

Mr. Stern: I was quoting the Audit Commission's figures, which are independent and would not be available under a Labour Government because I believe that the Labour party intends to abolish the Audit Commission.

The Audit Commission's figure for administering community charge benefits and collecting the community charge in Bristol was £19·90 per adult, and the figure for comparable authorities was £11·30. However, that does not mean that Bristol does not know how to save money. It saves money on collecting rents. At March 1990, its accumulated rent arrears were 25 per cent. higher than those of comparable authorities. Above all, and perhaps most relevant to today's debate, the authority saves money on the staff that it needs to deal with its finances, which presumably includes collecting the community charge. At March 1990, subject to inevitable differences in classification, while its overall staff level was considerably higher than that of comparable authorities, it had 239 fewer financial staff than the figure that other similar authorities reckoned they needed.

The techniques used by Bristol city council to collect the community charge are not just inefficient; they seem carefully designed to create the maximum suffering among people who are entitled to benefits. One of my constituents has dedicated his life to bringing up a large family, every one of whom is severely physically handicapped. Despite having to live largely on benefits, he has nevertheless had the courage to play a considerable part in the local community. Not surprisingly, he is entitled to a high community charge benefit. The council's response was to withdraw that benefit without warning in November and ask him to pay nearly £45 a month—about four and a half times what he had previously been paying. He came to see me nearly in tears because there was no way that he could possibly meet that bill out of his benefit. When I queried the bill, his rebate was reinstated and the only explanation given was that it had been withdrawn as a result of an annual review.

Another constituent was continually being reassessed for the amount of community charge payable despite the fact that there was no change in his circumstances. When I asked why, I was told that there was currently a problem with the computer software interface between the benefits system and the community charge system which meant that some bills were produced unnecessarily. That was in January, nearly 10 months after the introduction of the charge. Clearly the problems have not yet been resolved because the council has just sent out huge batches of arrears notices without any previous explanation to the recipient. Some of them are for tiny sums, and some of them have been withdrawn as soon as they were queried.

One group of people who I believe are wholly blameless for this chaos are the council officers involved——

Mr. Gould: The Government are responsible.

Mr. Stern: The Labour party is not interested in protecting council officers, but Conservative Members are.

There is no evidence that the council officers have done anything other than their best with the resources that they have been permitted by their political masters. The many apologies that I have received on behalf of my constituents for some of the errors and re-errors—I stress that the re-errors affect some of the most vulnerable members of the community—must have been painful ones for councillors to write.

A combination of misdirection of resources and failure to collect sums due to the council can be laid only at the door of the councillors who direct the council's functions. Councillors Robertson, Hammond, Naysmith and Micklewright and their acolytes determined that it was not worth collecting the money due and that the machinery for collection should be so inefficiently applied. Whether they did so out of incompetence or out of a desire to discredit the community charge I cannot say, but their recklessness

with public money in Bristol makes it inevitable that the Government should step in to ensure that those councillors have less money to mishandle.

8.7 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I hope that the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will not leave now because I wish to talk about the air of sweet reasonableness that he adopted. He had an air of calculated, warmhearted consideration for local authorities. I have never heard a Minister talk through his hat as much as the Minister did a moment ago.

The Minister said some fine words about Stoke-on-Trent and painted a pretty picture about what was being done to help. He showed that he does not know what he is talking about because Stoke-on-Trent has been heavily penalised by the Government. The Minister said that the Government's caps are reasonable and responsible. How can he say that about a system that hurts authorities that do not merit being hurt? The way in which Stoke-on-Trent has been hurt is shocking. I am surprised that both the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment can stand by their decision.

It has been rumoured that the local authority representatives who saw the Under-Secretary, as Stoke-on-Trent did in good faith, got nothing, while those who saw the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities got some concessions. That is only a rumour, but if it is true it shows a certain division within the Department, whereby the Under-Secretary was used as a foil, almost a bait. Everyone commented on how nice he was—of course he is a nice man of whom I am fond. However, he gave nothing, while the Minister gave concessions. Is there a little bit of political manoeuvring going on? I am prepared for the Ministers to deny that.

Mr. Portillo: The implication that my hon. Friend is a hard man and I am a softie is absurdly flattering to both of us.

Mr. Ashley: I am afraid that the Minister has misunderstood even what I said, let alone the policy. The implication was that his hon. Friend was the soft man and that he was the hard man. Far from flattering the Minister, I was insulting him.

I am sorry that Stoke-on-Trent has been included in the Government's proposals. The authority has never been extravagant or profligate. The Government's object is to hit authorities that have shown those tendencies. Stoke-on-Trent has set low rates for decades, owing to its low-paid workers and pottery industries. Because of that tradition of low rates, Stoke-on-Trent has no proper facilities. It is trying to change that, but is being prevented by the Government, who are adamantly capping the council's finances. That is an unrealistic action: Stoke-on-Trent is being hit as it tries to clamber out of the confinement of the current recession.

Stoke-on-Trent has been called a sick city—and rightly so. In half its wards, the average child will not live to experience retirement. Dereliction in the area is such that three times the national average number of houses have no inside WC and twice the national average number have no bath, while 53 per cent. of its houses are substandard.

Those are shocking figures. People may well call Stoke-on-Trent a sick city—although I prefer to call it a Cinderella city because it has been neglected by the Government and left to rot, yet it could have a glittering future if given the right kind of help. In the next four minutes, I shall plead for help from the Government. Mine will be a short speech, but it will put a reasoned case. I ask the Minister to stand up to the Treasury, and demand a fair deal for Stoke-on-Trent.

Stoke-on-Trent's 1990 standard spending assessment was low, and there was no significant improvement in 1991. The final insult was a £410,000 cut in the provisional assessment. When I complained about the low SSA to the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, he gave me an interesting answer. He said that the 16·6 per cent. increase was

"some way above the class average".

"Class average", however, is a meaningless concept when applied to a town such as Stoke-on-Trent. The realistic and relevant criterion would be obtained through a comparison with the nine largest shire districts in England.

Stoke-on-Trent's assessment is £128. The top figure is £237, and the average is £164. Where is the sense in that? Why should one district receive £128 and another £237? There is no justice or fairness there. It is outrageous that Leicester, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Hull, Southampton, Plymouth, Derby and Bristol should all have higher SSAs per head than Stoke-on-Trent. The Government are penalising a city that has already been penalised. Let me make it clear that I am not criticising the other cities that I have mentioned; if they can secure higher SSAs, good luck to them.

I am glad to see that the Secretary of State has arrived in the Chamber. I am in the process of putting the case for Stoke-on-Trent—a special case, for Stoke-on-Trent has been treated very badly.

As I have said, I do not criticise those other cities. I believe, however, that the Government have been grossly unfair; the comparison that I have highlighted is appalling. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will accept that they are damaging Stoke-on-Trent, and preventing it from breaking out of the poverty trap that has been inflicted on the whole county.

As I said, Stoke-on-Trent is a sick city. It is also a poor city. Unless the Secretary of State acts at the eleventh hour, it will become a depressed city. Stoke-on-Trent's achievements are widely known. It has tremendous potential owing to the attractions of its skilled labour force, its excellent industrial relations, its good communications and its enterprising spirit. Tonight, however, it needs help very badly. Even at this late stage, I look to the Secretary of State to provide that help.

8.16 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): It might well be asked what a respectable county like Warwickshire is doing in company like this—why it finds itself in the dock, awaiting sentence from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the House, along with all the old lags, by which I mean the profligate, high-spending Labour authorities which thoroughly deserve to be there. The answer lies in the grant settlement. In my speech, I shall submit that the county that I have the honour to represent—as do several of my hon. Friends who are present tonight—is being treated unfairly.

[Sir Dudley Smith]

It is only fair that I quote from a letter, dated 13 May, which I received from my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities. My hon. Friend wrote:

"There is no question of Warwickshire being treated differently from other authorities, as I have said SSAs are calculated on general principles and differences in assessments reflect differences in characteristics. A relatively low SSA per adult does not penalise the authority in question, it merely reflects the proportionately lower costs faced by that authority."

That may apply in a number of instances. Certainly I regret the fact that my county council was charge capped, although, to be fair, I am sure that it is capable of further economies—scarcely any institutions are not capable of that, if they look into their hearts. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave us half a loaf, and listened to the spirited representations made by Warwickshire Members and by the county council. Given the overall position, however—especially in regard to education—I do not think that Warwickshire could cope at this stage without the budget that it set itself. I believe, for two main reasons, that it would be unfair to reduce that budget to anything below £278·3 million.

Firstly, unlike many other authorities, the council decided a year ago not to use the introduction of the community charge as a smokescreen to hide irresponsible increases in expenditure. On the contrary, it took a number of restrictive financial steps to help support national policy, and to protect the population of Warwickshire from a high community charge. It reduced service budgets by £5·6 million, which was more than what was considered necessary, and £3 million of that reduction was intended to be only temporary, such as that relating to maintenance of roads and buildings and teachers in-service training—services that the council wanted to restore. A strong cash limit was set for pay and price increases, actual inflation was £2 million more than the amount that was provided, but the authority had to manage within the limits. The previous year's £1 million efficiency savings was removed from the budget permanently.

The precept was further reduced by taking £3·5 million from reserves and balances. As a result, the precept increased 11 per cent., compared with an average of 17 per cent. among county councils that the Audit Commission regards as fairly comparable with Warwickshire. That was the second lowest increase among county councils. Taking the past two years together, Warwickshire's precept increase is one of the lowest of all county councils.

The plain fact is that if Warwickshire had not made those reductions and used its reserves a year ago, it would not be facing capping along with profligate Labour councils. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a fair man, but it is unfair that Warwickshire, which has behaved so reasonably, is being punished.

Ms. Primarolo: May we assume that the hon. Gentleman will be joining us in the Lobby to vote against the cap for Warwickshire?

Sir Dudley Smith: The hon. Lady is right—I shall indeed. I do not blow hot and cold and fail to follow up my comments. I have much regard and respect for my right hon. Friend, who is a first-class Secretary of State, but he has been ill advised about Warwickshire by his officials and there is only one way to register my protest. Therefore, with much regret, although I hate voting with the Opposition, I shall vote with them today.

My second point in defence of Warwickshire concerns the standard spending assessment formula, which is not only used to distribute revenue support grant but forms part of the criteria for selecting authorities to be capped. The formula consists of numerous elements, many of which Warwickshire regards as demonstrably unfair. I shall try not to weary the House, but I must give one or two important figures. The formula assumes that Warwickshire will earn £6·7 million interest on revenue balances and what are called usable capital receipts. But expected interest is only £1·5 million—a difference of £5·2 million. Revenue balances and expected capital receipts are low, so once again Warwickshire, which behaved sensibly last year in reducing its commitments, is being penalised for using reserves to reduce its community charge.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend puts the case well. Does he agree that Warwickshire had a shortfall when the system changed from rate support grant to revenue support grant which is continuing from the previous year to this year? Grant increased by a modest amount this year, but that aggravated the problem which began in the first year of the scheme.

Sir Dudley Smith: My hon. Friend is right. That is why Warwickshire finds itself in the dock. Officials have not paid sufficient regard to that aspect.

The formula assumes that Warwickshire's labour costs are lower than in the south-east of England. That, too, is unfair as most pay scales are based on national rates. For teachers and police officers—almost half Warwickshire's work force—significant local discretion is not only impractical but is not allowed. This part of the formula leaves the Warwickshire charge payer £26 worse off than a community charge payer in Oxfordshire. No one could say that Oxfordshire is Warwickshire's poor relation. The unfairness is compounded by the fact that, although the formula assumes lower labour costs in Warwickshire than in the south-east, it does not allow for higher costs in Warwickshire than in other parts of the country.

Another unfairness stems from time lags. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the M40 motorway was opened recently and should have increased Warwickshire's SSA by almost £1 million. That would have been valuable, but we are not sure whether the figures will be fed through even in time for 1992-93. I am advised that other time lags have had a similar effect.

The SSA formula for the police does not reflect unavoidable costs falling on Warwickshire as a result of its having far more long-serving officers than average, and of its having to pay higher than average housing allowances. My hon. Friends and I have been to see the Home Secretary about that.

The fire service SSA for Warwickshire is £2·6 million less than the 1991-92 budget—a difference of more than 30 per cent. The service has remedied the over-provision identified by Her Majesty's inspector and I am sure that he would not support further reductions.

The county tells me that the SSA formula means that the less permission an authority receives from the Government to incur capital expenditure on credit, the less revenue money it needs to use instead. The authority

regards that as nonsense, and so do I. It hits Warwickshire especially hard as the county has the second lowest basic credit approval per charge payer of all English county councils.

A year ago, changes to the Department of the Environment's formula for deciding the appropriate spending for each authority cost Warwickshire £13 million overnight. Once again, it lost out disproportionately. That was the second worst change per charge payer of any county council. On 31 March last year, Warwickshire's education budget was within 1 per cent. of the education SSA's predecessor. The next day, despite adopting a tight budget for 1990-91, Warwickshire was deemed to be overspending on education by £11 million. That was partly a result of the Department of the Environment's civil servants attaching unreasonable weight to additional education needs. Such volatility must call into question the credibility of the SSA system.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will my hon. Friend reflect on what may happen next year? Will he find time in his speech to ask Ministers whether they will carefully consider the SSAs for next year so that we do not find ourselves in the same position as this year?

Sir Dudley Smith: My hon. Friend anticipates what I was about to say. He knows the line that many of us have tried to develop before. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is here because he is the man who can help us.

The credibility of the SSA system is being questioned by Tory, socialist and Liberal Democrat county councillors in Warwickshire and by chief officers. They all believe that something is wrong with the system as it applies to Warwickshire.

Plainly, the situation cannot continue. My hon. Friends and I must go to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State fairly soon with my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-upon-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude). I appreciate that they are in a difficult position as they are members of the Government, but we must ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider Warwickshire in a different light in order to achieve fairness in the future. I think that we can reach an accommodation and I hope that we shall.

I very much regret that I have no alternative but to vote against the Government tonight.

Mrs. Gorman: Shame.

Sir Dudley Smith My hon. Friend says, "Shame", but it would be a hollow thing to make a speech such as I have made and then to abstain or walk away. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a perceptive politician. He realises the pressures generated in our county and why I shall vote against the Government. I shall do it not with delight, but with sorrow. In doing so, I hope that my hon. Friends and I will be able in due course to get a better deal from the Department of the Environment.

8.30 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I join other hon. Members who have expressed their deep sorrow about what happened tonight in India—the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. It is an appalling thing to happen in the world's biggest democracy. In our democracy such an event has not been successful in recent years, although very nearly so, and all hon. Members will feel strong sympathy for his family.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): It happened to Ian Gow.

Mr. Taylor: I was referring to party leaders and the incident involving the Prime Minister which was not successful. We have dealt with democratic issues tonight, so, in that sense, it may be relevant.

The order is an admission of failure by the Government. The fact that it is being debated at all shows that the Government have failed to create a system of local finance that it can leave to local authorities to operate. The Government have not created an accountable system in the way that they claimed that they would when they first suggested the poll tax.

The order creates more chaos, adds to the overwhelming cost of the tax and will mean that some poll tax payers will have been faced with a multitude of bills within the space of a few weeks. Another round of capping shows how far the poll tax has failed to deliver on one of its prime aims, which was to increase accountability between councils and the electorate. It is also a reason—admittedly one of many—why the poll tax has had to go.

It must not be forgotten that the poll tax was supposed, in the Government's terms, to rescue voters trapped in high-spending Labour authorities. The Government's logic was that once all those who did not under the old rating system have the burden of huge bills faced huge poll tax demands, they would vote Conservative for lower bills. However, all that has happened is that those who were trapped by high rates are now hit by high poll tax. The local elections showed that across Britain the electorate is voting against the Conservative party which introduced those poll tax bills. The electorate is clear about where the responsibility lies.

However, it is not the promise of high bills and services that creates the Lambeths of this country—it is the electoral system. The Government have been prepared to sacrifice Lambeth residents and others to protect their fiefdoms in areas such as Wandsworth.

The figures for Lambeth, which is being capped again, show how one-party domination of the borough is not supported by the voters. In 1986 and in 1990, most of the votes cast in Lambeth were against the Labour party, but at both elections the Labour party was returned with a majority of seats. In 1990, Lambeth had the highest poll tax in the country and the majority of voters voted against the ruling party, yet Labour still controls the council. Therefore, the accountability argument is meaningless in the face of an unrepresentative electoral system. A fair voting system would ensure that, in party terms, the voters had the council for which they voted. I believe that that would inevitably mean that they were able at last to exercise control over the financial direction of that council.

Capping is thus a product of a corrupt and unfair electoral system combined with a corrupt, unfair and unworkable local tax and a grant equalisation system about which one can say, at the very least, that there is a suspicion that it arbitrarily helps some councils while penalising others.

Capping as a solution not only takes away local democracy, but means real cuts in services—cuts that will affect people's welfare, whether they are cuts in swimming

[Mr. Taylor]

pools and libraries or cuts in social services and education. Poll tax capping is a particular evil if the council is also the local education authority because the education budget is usually the largest and is, therefore, inevitably the one most cut.

Let us consider Tory-run Warwickshire, for example. We have heard much about Warwickshire and I am delighted that at least one Conservative Member who represents a Warwickshire constituency will vote against the Government tonight. I hope that others will follow him because, as he said, they have good reason to do so.

Warwickshire county council set a budget of £278 million, which meant cuts of £7 million in services. The capping limit was £272 million, although that has now been changed to £275 million. At the £272 million capping level, 211 teachers faced redundancy, and even now it is estimated that 20 to 40 teacher redundancies will still be necessary—all this when class sizes in some schools are still in the high thirties. Other cuts include those in in-service training for teachers, in-school maintenance budgets, the removal of support for standard assessment tests and for national curriculum preparation. There will also be cuts in the youth service, in the careers service, in the peripatetic music service, in library services and in adult education —the list goes on. Warwickshire is not a high-spending Labour council; it is a so-called cost-conscious Tory council. So much for the practical effects of the Government's actions on councils run by their own party.

Wirral is a classic example of a council where people have been caught between Government policies and local Labour irresponsibility. Cuts of about £7·9 million now have to be made which could have been avoided had the ruling Labour group made savings last year. Instead, it decided to pick a collision course with the Government, and the Government were only too happy to oblige with a collision course of their own.

Of the £7·9 million in cuts, almost £5 million will be taken from the education budget. That includes a cut of £1 million from the Wirral metropolitan college—so much for the Government's statement yesterday on education if colleges are having their budgets cut rather than increased. The schools budget will be cut by £1·3 million. What type of system allows and encourages education to be a political football and which means that the children in the classroom end up the losers?

Those examples cause me to wonder what cuts we should be facing in Cornwall if the county's Tory Members had had their way. When Cornwall county council was setting last year's budget, the county's four Tory Members called on the Government to cap the county. Fortunately, they did not get their way, not least because the county was not by any stretch of the imagination an overspender. If the Tory MPs had had their way, Cornwall would be facing the same devastation of services suffered in the areas that have been capped. Would we be sacking teachers, cutting vital social services and leaving school buildings in bad repair? Would children have the books and equipment that they need? Would village schools have closed? What did those Tory MPs have in mind?

Inadequate Government funding means that Cornwall county council cannot spend what it needs to spend on education and cannot respond to the cry from parents for the investment to improve decaying Victorian schools which do not have the facilities to meet the Government's minimum standards, to bring them up to the level that parents and children should expect. In an effort to keep the poll tax as low as possible, Cornwall county council has this year set a budget under the standard spending assessment, as it has done every year but one. That one year was not because it wildly spent money, but because, quite extraordinarily and without any discernible reason, the SSA suddenly dropped and the council became, we were told, an overspender instead of an underspender. We are told it is an underspender again this year. This is the ludicrous and laughable system which the Government call fair and equitable but which is about as steady and measured as a yo-yo. The fact that Cornwall county council was fortunate not to be cut back is shown above all by the comments of Conservative Members who represent Warwickshire and who have experienced just how harsh, unfair and unrepresentative is the reality of poll tax capping.

If the order were the final throw of a doomed system, it would not be so bad, but we know that we have years yet to come of the poll tax and that we have years yet to come of the capping system—if the Government get their way. For the country, the demise of the poll tax is not so much a sudden death as like an old-fashioned B-movie horror film in which the monster sinks back into the depths, swiping out all around and taking many with it.

Ministers must tell us tonight what will happen next year if there is a late election. Will the grant system continue unamended? Will we continue to have ludicrous, unaccountable decisions taken in Whitehall as at present? What will be the likely levels of the poll tax? Who will be capped next year? Above all, what will be the impact on council revenues of the additional non-payment resulting from people thinking that the poll tax has been abolished? How easy will it be for local authorities to collect payments from people when the Government now acknowledge that the bills are unfair, and unworkable, and should be abolished? The councils are being put into an impossible situation and the result will be even more chaos and difficulty.

The tragedy is that an alternative is available to the Government. An alternative has always been available. It is fair, accountable, used in other countries and recommended by many independent bodies including the Layfield committee. The alternative is a local income tax, which is the only system directly related to ability to pay, the only system that uses a structure that is already in place and the only system that uses the system of taxation that the Government use nationally because they recognise that it has a measure of fairness. Such a tax would win great local support and would allow devolution of control to local authorities which no other system can do because no other is fair enough. The link between the charge and the council would be there for all to see with a local income tax. The fairness between one individual and another would be there for all to see.

The Liberal Democrats can promise what the other parties cannot—that, under our system, we will not have capping because we will not need capping. We would honour what a local authority decided democratically because, under a fair electoral system and a fair taxation system, there would be genuine local accountability.

Under the council tax, the Government have already made it plain that they will thwart local democracy and

introduce vigorous capping powers. It is, as usual, unclear what the Labour party will do and how they will tackle their own party's extravagance and overspending. The truth is that Labour dare not introduce the one thing that would measure the accountability that it claims to want, which is a genuinely representative electoral system. It appears that the only option to which Labour can resort is the wholesale expulsion of its awkward councillors around the country.

The Government may claim that the powers in the order are welcome in the areas affected. Everybody who has contacted me from those areas and everybody from those areas to whom I have talked believes that the powers are anything but welcome. Where we see Conservative local authorities capped, we see Conservative Members denying that the powers are welcome in their areas. They point out how unfair and how harsh capping is. The truth is that the only reason that Conservative Members will support the measure tonight is that most Conservative areas have been removed from any threat of capping by the creation of a ludicrous, unrepresentative and entirely invented system to ensure that most Conservative councils escape. I hope that it will not be simply one hon. Member from Warwickshire who votes against the measure, but that it will be all of them and that they will take many of their colleagues with them.

8.43 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I shall not fall into the temptation of following the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) in a discussion of all the different methods of raising local government finance. However, I know that my constituents would not welcome a local income tax, which would be highly expensive for many of them and would set up new bureaucracies within local government organisations. The hon. Gentleman's party needs to rethink that aspect of its policy.

I support the Government's decision to cap overspending local authorities. I also favour such action in the case of Norwich city council, which takes in part of my constituency. I will be fairly critical of the Labour politicians who are in charge in Norwich, but that criticism is not intended to be a criticism of the many people who work in Norwich city council and who help to respond to my constituency cases—I say this in the presence of the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who will, I am sure, agree—in a very efficient way. However, I shall be very critical of the Labour politicians who run Norwich city council.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The hon. Gentleman represents part of the city of Norwich which may explain why his visibility in that great city is within a glimmer of vanishing point. Before he starts his attack on Norwich city Labour councillors, will he agree that that city has been under Labour control for 55 years, that in the past two May local elections the Tory party came third and that the representation of Tory councillors on Norwich council is two or three—I cannot remember which—and will almost certainly vanish completely within the next couple of May elections? Is not that a verdict by the people of Norwich on the councillors whom the hon. Gentleman is about to attack?

Mr. Thompson: I should be very much out of order if I were to pursue that point. However, the hon. Member for Norwich, South will know that the Labour vote fell in the most recent local elections in the city part of my constituency. The hon. Gentleman knows that, in two successive general elections, the Tory majority in my part of the city of Norwich——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying far from the order.

Mr. Thompson: I have to do enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, to respond to what the hon. Member for Norwich, South said. The hon. Gentleman is wholly wrong in every statement. However, I will follow your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, and return to the order.

I said that I was about to be critical of the Labour politicians who control Norwich city council, but I do not think that this is the right place for me to be critical of my colleagues in the House of Commons, so I shall confine my remarks to the local scene in Norwich.

The city council has chosen to penalise local residents in my constituency by exceeding its target by 25 per cent. and by breaking the £15 million ceiling that the Government have rightly put on its precept. I support, therefore, the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to intervene to protect individual community charge payers in Norwich and to protect the interests of taxpayers as well. That is inevitable and it is right. After all, if Norwich city council had been left to its own devices, my constituents in the city part of Norwich would have suffered. The hon. Member for Norwich, South does not have my advantage. Within my boundaries, I also have the Tory authority of Broadland district council, which has held down its community charge to the benefit of my constituents.

Mr. John Garrett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thompson: I will not give way again.

Mr. Garrett *rose*——

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman does not like it. I am not giving way.

Mr. Garrett *rose*——

Mr. Thompson: I have given way once and I am not giving way again. The hon. Gentleman does not like my referring to the comparison between Tory-controlled Broadland district council and overspending Norwich city council.

Mr. Garrett: What about the services?

Mr. Thompson: I will not be tempted to talk about the swimming pool in the Tory-controlled area and the lack of good facilities in the Labour-controlled area.

My constituents, thanks to Norwich city council, would have had to face a community charge of £433, which was excessive by any standards. Thanks to the intervention of my right hon. Friend and other Ministers, and thanks to the intervention of the Government, that has been decreased through the various reduction schemes to £293. As a result of this order, the figure has been further reduced to £277. Whatever Opposition Members may say, the people who matter are the individuals who receive and pay for the services of the local council. Those individuals will benefit from the order as they have benefited from the Government's earlier intervention.

[Mr. Thompson]

It is the responsibility of the Government and the House to determine the overall level of public spending and taxation. A major share of public expenditure, just over £39 billion in 1991-92, is at present in the hands of the local authorities. The Government have rightly been generous in their financial settlements for local authorities in 1991-92. An extra £3 billion in grants and the distribution of the uniform business rate has been provided. The community charge reduction scheme, which is worth some £1·3 billion, has also been put in place. I make no apologies for quoting those figures. Tonight's debate centres on sums of money and the help that the Government have given for the benefit of our constituents. There has been an injection of some £4·3 billion in the Budget announcement aimed at cutting the community charge by about £140 per head.

Therefore, if we look back to 1990-91, there is no doubt that councils, not just Norwich, have set their community charges at too high a level to be tolerable. But there is no doubt either that because of the Government's action the real difficulties faced by a number of my constituents last year will be effectively mitigated. I say in the presence of my hon. Friend the Minister that I am grateful for the help that has been given to my constituents who are having to pay the charge. I find it difficult to understand why Opposition Members do not look at the matter from the point of view of individual constituents rather than from the point of view of those who are running the council. I cannot press that point too strongly. The changes, together with the prospect of the new council tax, are welcome to me and to my constituents.

Norwich city council has been one of the beneficiaries of the Government's generosity. Its spending target has been increased from £10·3 million in 1990-92 to more than £13 million in this financial year. A rise of some 28 per cent. in SSA is well above the rate of inflation, however that is defined. The SSA formula applies criteria across the country to reflect each authority's social, geographic and demographic characteristics. Therefore, claims by Norwich city council that the formula is in some way arbitrary are wide of the mark. The total external finance from the combination of the business rate and revenue support grant increased from just under £40 million last year to more than £45 million in 1991-92—a rise of some 14 per cent. for the area within Norwich city council boundaries. Therefore, there is no truth in Norwich city council's claim that it is in some way badly treated in the distribution of Government support.

A case is put forward by Norwich city council to justify its overspending, but that case needs close examination and is highly suspect. It claims to limit its call on the poll tax to around the annual rate of inflation, but the increase in community charge precept of some 10·7 per cent. was agreed in March when the retail prices index was running at just over 8 per cent. It is now running at just over 6 per cent. and is still falling. That destroys that argument. Therefore, the community charge per head in Norwich is up nearly 12 per cent. The truth is that Norwich has set the community charge for the people of Norwich well above the rate of inflation and it knows that. That is one reason why we have the order before us tonight.

I want to say a brief word about capital funding, about which there is some discussion in Norwich. We hear complaints from the council that it is unduly restricted in using its capital receipts from council house sales to fund new building—a point that it makes continually in public debate. But the council operates a covert policy to discourage people from exercising their right to buy. The housing committee in Norwich frequently increases the valuation of properties made by its own staff or by professionals—a matter that has already been raised in parliamentary questions by me. The record of determination by the district valuer shows a consistent overturning of the council valuations as being too high. The council also effectively deters some housing associations from operating in Norwich by giving priority to its own applications for approval. Therefore, the crisis in capital funding about which the council so often cries is a crisis of its own making. It is important that that point should be made this evening.

As I said in an intervention at the beginning of the Minister's speech, we have heard before about a threat to Norwich's historic buildings and role as a regional capital if capping were to take place. No one is a more ardent supporter of the preservation of historic buildings in Norwich than I am. That is not a political issue. Anyone who tries to make it a political issue is trying once again to mislead or deceive the public. We have had enough of that. We all want the preservation of historic buildings in Norwich or anywhere else.

The planning committee in Norwich—it is worth listening to this because it is important and I am about to produce figures—plans to spend some £17,160 on historic buildings and monuments in the year ending 31 March 1992, some £35,950 on city towers and walls and some £96,330 on closed churchyards. If those figures are added together, we are talking about a figure of a completely different order of magnitude from the £1·5 million which is involved in the order. As I said earlier, and as my hon. Friend confirmed, Norwich has adequate reserves to cover such expenditure. It is no good Norwich city council deflecting the debate from the main issue to that of the preservation of buildings, which we all support.

It is equally unlikely that the role of Norwich as the focus of civic life, entertainment and sport would be remotely threatened by the order. Every hon. Member in his heart of hearts knows why the order applies to Norwich city council and to the other Labour councils involved. There is no need for dramatic consequences if Norwich city council acts responsibly.

The fact is that the record of Norwich city council—which, as the hon. Member for Norwich, South said, has been in control for far too long—has not been encouraging. The business of that council is conducted largely, in my experience, to enable party political points to be made on behalf of the Labour party generally. High spending has been, and remains, part of that approach. That is unacceptable to my constituents. That is why there was a fall in the Labour vote in the recent local government elections and an increase, despite any delusions that the hon. Gentleman may harbour, in the Conservative vote in Labour-held city wards. If he is complacent about his majority of 300, I think that he should spend a little more time looking after his constituents rather than coming here to make unwarranted attacks on the Government, or on his colleagues.

It is worse than that. Norwich city council is showing an ambition to take in the fringe areas of Norwich and bring them under Labour control. My constituents in Old

Catton, Sprowston, Hellesdon and Thorpe St. Andrew would resist that ambition, for the reasons that have been made clear this evening. I shall support them in resisting that ambition of the Labour party.

For that reason, I am pleased to support the order. I shall therefore be pleased also to vote for it. I am sure that Norwich city council's record is exactly as I have described it. The lessons will be learnt at the next general election.

9 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Having sat through this debate, I shall have great difficulty going back to Stoke-on-Trent and explaining to my constituents why the Government have chosen to charge cap the city of Stoke-on-Trent. The more I listened to the debate, the more I remembered all the meetings that the leaders of Stoke-on-Trent city council and the leaders of industry and commerce in the city have had with previous Secretaries of State for the Environment and with the present Secretary of State. We told the Secretary of State that the city urgently needed more money so that it could deal with its problems, but we got absolutely nowhere. The Secretary of State is not even in the Chamber to listen to the debate. He intends to go ahead and charge cap the authority, but we have not been told why Stoke-on-Trent is to be charge capped.

The whole procedure is a sham. No recourse to appeal will be open to the city, following the debate. It is clear that, with a few honourable exceptions on the Conservative Benches, there will be a party Whip and that Conservative Members will vote through this huge reduction for Stoke-on-Trent.

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Lady referred to a Whip on the Government side of the House. Can she confirm that there is a Whip on her side as well?

Ms. Walley: It is not for me to confirm or deny whether there is a Whip on this side of the House. That a Conservative Member should make such a cheap gibe when we are talking about charge capping the city of Stoke-on-Trent shows that the Government have no arguments to put forward and nothing with which to make their case.

We heard earlier that the order is all about saving money, but that makes a mockery of local government. The debate is all about saving the Government's economic policies. How can a Minister stand at the Dispatch Box and say that the Government have to make all these savings and show that their economic policies are working by curbing local government spending? The introduction of these caps will save £9·7 million out of a total budget of £39 billion—and the saving will be made entirely at the expense of a few constituents, including those in Stoke-on-Trent.

The Minister also said that the cuts for Stoke-on-Trent are affordable and achievable. When he sums up the debate I should like him to tell us how they can be achieved for Stoke-on-Trent. I do not think that either the officials sitting in the box reserved for them or the Ministers have scrutinised——

Madam Deputy Speaker: As a Front-Bench Member, the hon. Lady should know that she should not refer to officials or to anyone not in the Chamber itself.

Ms. Walley: I am grateful for that advice, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. John Garrett: It does not matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It matters very much indeed.

Ms. Walley: Ministers and the Secretary of State have formulated the standard spending assessment in a way which does not enable the budget of Stoke-on-Trent city council to be closely scrutinised. The SSA has been formulated without access to what is happening in the city. It does not have regard to the everyday problems that my constituents face.

Contrary to what we heard from the Minister, Stoke-on-Trent is not a profligate authority. It is a low-spending council, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). Even last year our limit on spending was £33·7 million. We could have had £36 million, but the Government have decided to set a cap of £25·8 million although our submission was for £28 million. I should like the Minister to say why our expenditure has been so substantially reduced this year compared with what the Government were prepared to allow last year.

The Minister has told us that there has been a staggering increase in the city's spending, but that does not fit the facts. In Stoke-on-Trent it costs £2·7 million to collect the poll tax whereas it cost £445,000 to collect the rates. The Government introduced an uncollectable tax. It is their fault that we have to find an extra £2 million just to collect the poll tax. So the Government are responsible for the overspending.

In an earlier intervention, I said that Leicester city council has £237 per head of population to spend while Stoke-on-Trent has £128. Although in one respect it is not helpful to make comparisons between councils, Stoke-on-Trent and Leicester city councils are both major district councils and some comparison should be made between the amount of money that Stoke-on-Trent city council has to spend and that which similar councils have.

As though all the things that I have mentioned were not bad enough, in the middle of January we suddenly had the news that Stoke-on-Trent was to lose a further £400,000 as a result of changes in the way in which the standard spending assessment is calculated. Those changes affected Stoke-on-Trent city council more than any other council.

Stoke-on-Trent city council is not a partnership authority. We do not have access to other money to make up for the shortfall. We do not have urban aid projects. We have already heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South that Stoke-on-Trent is a sick city. Independent research has shown that the amount and degree of ill health in our city is worse than anywhere else in the country. North Staffordshire district health authority has had visits from the Minister for Health, who gave assurances that she would make representations across Government Departments. She said that she would raise the case with the Department of the Environment and suggest that a way should be found to increase the amount that we can spend on health promotion and prevention of illness in response to the shocking findings to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South referred earlier, including the fact that more than half the people in some electoral wards cannot hope to receive their old age pension because they will die before they are even entitled to it.

[Ms. Walley]

Stoke-on-Trent city council has done a considerable amount to provide resources to improve the health of people in the city, but initiatives such as the "Colcloughs" series on local radio which pioneers health education and attempts to make people take account of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles and tackle the environment-related illnesses in the city are likely to be cut or damaged.

In the past six months, unemployment has increased dramatically, particularly in manufacturing industry and in the ceramics and allied industries, for which our city is world renowned. The Minister referred earlier to our housing investment programme and how well it had done. But 53 per cent. of our properties are unfit, and it is essential that that be recognised in the Government's housing allocation. It must be reflected in the amount of money that the city council is allowed to spend. The demands that the city's housing problems make on its housing budget mean that the many disabled people in the city who have rightly applied for improvement grants and for assistance with disablement adaptations are not being catered for because there simply is not enough money.

Despite the absence of urban aid funds, Stoke-on-Trent has some very good voluntary organisations. I pay tribute in particular to the citizens advice bureau for its work. I understand that it enjoys a national reputation for the kind of advice that it gives to people in a state of poverty. There is a strong likelihood of an across-the-board reduction in grants to voluntary organisations. How can the Minister justify taking this amount of money away from Stoke-on-Trent city council? By cutting the grants to voluntary organisations, he is preventing them from enabling people to secure extra entitlement.

How does the Minister square the new legislative responsibilities of local authorities, including those under the environment protection legislation, with the funds that are available to them? Stoke-on-Trent city council, through its highways department and its environmental health department, is spending more than £63,000 just to discharge its new responsibilities in respect of litter and other aspects of environmental health. How does the Minister expect us to find that extra money when he is taking money away? The city of Stoke-on-Trent has had years of underspending, and there is a lot of catching up to be done. The order will force us into a poverty trap from which we shall be unable to escape.

The standard spending assessment is flawed. Even the Conservative opposition on Stoke-on-Trent city council agree that the manner in which it is fixed is flawed. They agree with 83 per cent. of treasurers throughout the country that this is not the way to calculate the amount of money that local authorities should receive from central Government. Why does the Secretary of State not take account of the health disparity in the city?

I find it very difficult to advise my constituents as to what will happen next. This debate is our last hope of convincing the Secretary of State that capping should not go ahead. Once the decision has been taken, there will be no redress. Parliament will not consider the matter at a later stage. But, day in and day out, the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent will have to live with the decision, and to meet the cost. Council leaders, trade unions and voluntary organisations will have to make very painful decisions. In the midst of the present Government-inspired recession, local industry will suffer. There will be less money for development of the local infrastructure, on which industry depends.

For all those reasons, I urge the Government to take account of the problems faced by the people of Stoke-on-Trent. It is an almost vindictive act—the Government are forcing through a formula without any regard whatever for the public services on which we all rely.

9.14 pm

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): I rise once again to speak for my constituents in the infamous socialist borough of Lambeth, where even the Labour bosses have turned 13 duly-elected Lambeth councillors out of the Labour party—out of the positions into which they had been voted. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) had the nerve to speak of trusting local government, and of true democracy in local government. I was astounded by that. Thank heavens that the Government have come to the rescue of my constituents.

The community charge first announced for this year by Lambeth was £590 a head. The £140-a-head from central Government funds reduced that figure to £450 a head. The capping order, which I shall support tonight, brings the figure down to about £420 a head. That is still outrageously high—as far as I know it is the highest in the country—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] My hon. Friends tell me that it is. I welcome the cap, which will protect my constituents. The hardship that a charge of £590 a head would have caused can only be imagined.

I must confess to my hon. Friend the Minister that I welcome the decision to fix the cap at £311 million rather than £307 million, which will give Lambeth about £3·9 million more. As a result, Streatham pool will remain open. More than 11,000 people signed the petitions in about four weeks, and now the pool will stay open, thanks to the Government and to the pressure exerted by my constituents—and thanks, in some part, I acknowledge, to the good sense of some Lambeth councillors.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is not my hon. Friend being unduly modest? Is it not fair to say that he, too, should take considerable credit for keeping the swimming pool open?

Sir William Shelton: I have always regarded my hon. Friend as a wise and sensible man.

I welcome the community charge reduction scheme. It is almost unknown in my constituency, and, I suspect, equally unknown throughout the country. Yet it will have a profound effect on many of my constituents. In Lambeth in 1989-90 the average rates bill was £516. Any two community charge payers living in what was then an averagely rated house or flat would pay only £568 instead of £840. Any two people paying half average rates would pay only £310 instead of £840, and two people who paid a quarter of average rates would pay £181 between them instead of £840. Those are tremendous reductions. I hope that Lambeth council is aware of the scheme and will implement it.

Lambeth council claims that, because of what it calls the absurd capping, it is having to make cuts across the board. Yet Government funding for Lambeth for 1991-92 is 23 per cent. higher than it was last year—£296 million instead of £240 million. Lambeth also receives some £300

per head more than do residents of Wandsworth, the neighbouring authority. Hon. Members can compare the two boroughs.

Education funding, too, is 18 per cent. higher—£125 million this year as opposed to £105 million last year, plus £6·5 million or so in Inner London education authority transfer grant. I suggest that the Government should consider ring-fencing education budgets. Lambeth council has raised its education budget. It is making cuts across the board, especially in education, despite the fact that it has had a 23 per cent. increase—probably about 15 per cent. or more in real terms.

Adult education is suffering gravely. Teacher numbers have been reduced. I spent this morning in an infants and primary school and the staff are desperately worried. They have been told that there seems to be no provision for special needs in Lambeth education because it is denied that some children have special needs.

I understand that we have the longest waiting list in the country in connection with the right to buy. If it is not the longest, heaven help those that have longer lists.

The services were bad enough before, and I suspect that they will become even worse. I do not know whether it is due to present or past inefficiency and incompetence, but the result has been a debt burden of tens of millions of pounds. It can be estimated at between £40 million and £120 million, depending upon which way it is calculated. Certainly it is so large because of uncollected rates, uncollected rents and uncollected community charge. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) is enjoying my speech so much. If he talked less, he might listen a bit more.

I am told that because of this vast debt from the past only 60 per cent. or less of the community charge is being spent on Lambeth services, the remainder being spent on servicing the debt around Lambeth's neck: 45 per cent. goes on debt and 55 per cent. on services. So I guess that it is due to past and present incompetence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), when he opened the debate, said that constituents look to the Government for protection and that that is why we are passing the capping order tonight. There is a rising cry of despair in my constituency. My constituents are asking me why the Government cannot protect them by intervening in Lambeth. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Labour London manifesto in which there is reference to something called quality control —I am not quite sure what it is—which, it says, will offer just such intervention and protection in councils such as Lambeth.

I ask my hon. Friend to consider exactly what is going on south of the river in my constituency, which is not far from here. Will my hon. Friend intervene soon in housing and in education to protect my constituents? That is my plea to him and my right hon. Friend.

9.23 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I wish to start with a protest at what I regard as the discourtesy of Ministers for education and the environment. The hon. Member for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton), my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and I have met several delegations, particularly of teachers, parents and governors, concerned about the effect of rate capping on education services in Lambeth. We agreed unanimously to approach both education Ministers and environment Ministers to represent Lambeth's case in respect of the cap. Representations were made to the Department of the Environment by the hon. Member for Streatham.

Although it is clear from some of the speeches made today that Ministers have received personal representations from Conservative Members about the capping of their authorities, they have refused to see the all-party delegation of Members of Parliament from Lambeth. It is a great pity that we have been treated with that degree of disrespect. It was not a particularly Labour-party point of view that we wanted to put—it was an all-party point of view reflecting the views of parents, governors and representatives in Lambeth.

Mr. Portillo: I am not sure that I am wholly familiar with the circumstances, but two issues are at play here. We may have overlooked an early letter from the hon. Gentleman—if that is so, I apologise to him—and his subsequent approach may have been out of time, when the consultation period had closed. Whatever the circumstances, I confirm that in principle we are absolutely willing to meet hon. Members who wish to make representations about capping during the period that we are out for consultation on capping. If there has been any discourtesy to the hon. Gentleman, I apologise unreservedly.

Mr. Fraser: I accept the apology—one always accepts an apology in this place—but the Minister asks for the prerogative of mercy after the execution has taken place. I hope that it does not happen again.

Governments of every political complexion will from time to time wish to restrain the level of local authority spending, for two principal reasons. The first reason is that high levels of local government taxation or central Government taxation are politically unpopular. I have never argued for high levels of taxation in Lambeth. Those whom I represent cannot afford that sort of taxation as they are extremely poor people. High levels of taxation are politically unpopular, as colleagues of mine such as Eric Deakins became aware during the 1987 general election. Secondly, high levels of local government taxation can punch a hole through the Government's economic strategy and cause rises in the rate of inflation. That was the lesson of the Labour Government in 1970. That Administration paid the penalty for the increases in rates and rents introduced by many Conservative-controlled local authorities.

What can a Government do? They can do one of three things. They can pay more money to reduce the level of rates or poll tax, as the case may be, as the Labour Government did when they increased rate support grant levels to about 60 per cent. The level varied but it was about 60 per cent. when we went out of office. That is exactly the action that the present Government have taken. They have seen the error of their ways and provided a grant which is to be paid for by an increase in value added tax—a grant of £140 per poll tax payer.

Secondly, there is the democratic sanction—the argument for which was advanced on Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill on 16 and 17 December 1988. That argument was advanced today by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), speaking from the Opposition Front Bench.

The third option is a statutory restriction of the type that we are discussing today. The fact that we are

[Mr. Fraser]

discussing the order at all is a sign of the Government's failure. When the 1988 Bill was passing through the House we were told that capping would cease, that the subsidy option would come to an end and that the answer would be provided by a sort of angry democracy because local government finance was to be arranged so that it would be possible to penalise the poorest members of the community, who would then be moved to vote against high-spending local authorities. But that has not happened, and that is why the order is a measure of the Government's failure.

The present limit on expenditure as a result of the amendment of the draft order is to be £311 million for Lambeth, which works out at about £1,800 per adult member of the population. There are, however, considerable differences over the local population. There are the most recent census statistics, the estimates of the local authorities and the estimates of the Department of the Environment. As I have said, however, the expenditure per adult member of the borough is about £1,800.

Actual expenditure was £296 million—£11 million above the capped expenditure level of £285 million. If we are to compare one year with another, we must take actual expenditure into account. The effect of the new rate-capped limit means that Lambeth will be able to spend about £15 million more this year than it spent last year, but the increase in expenditure year on year is only 5 per cent. Comparative expenditure would have increased the rate of inflation, which went up to about 9 per cent. Inescapably, therefore, last year's cap and last year's actual expenditure must imply a cut in services of various kinds of about 4 per cent.

Unfortunately, the cut in services is rather greater than the figures would suggest because Lambeth has been forced to provide for past bad debts. I shall not go into the reason why some of them were incurred. It was partly due to previous Government legislation over rates penalties. Be that as it may, however, part of the £311 million cap represents a provision for past bad debt and not expenditure on services. If one takes out the provision for debt, the real cut in services in Lambeth is in the region of 8 or 9 per cent., which is a very severe cut indeed.

It is no use the hon. Member for Streatham saying that Lambeth is getting more central Government assistance for its expenditure. That is absolutely true and we do not disagree about it, but capping limits what can be spent. The effect of increased support is a reduction in the level of the poll tax, which is very welcome, but that does not deal with the problem that as a result of the provision for debt and the level of capping there will be a cut in the real level of services in Lambeth in the forthcoming year.

Sir William Shelton: I listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman, I understand what he is saying and I entirely agree that the major problem that we face in Lambeth is the provision and servicing of that wretched debt. Together, before next year comes, we should approach whatever Government are in power to seek a way to reschedule the borough's debt or we shall never find ourselves in a good financial position.

Mr. Fraser: I am glad that we have reached a consensus on that. That is exactly the sort of representation that we wanted to make to the Department of the Environment this year, but because our letters and representations were overlooked we did not have that opportunity. I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However one looks at it, there is bound to be a cut in the level of services in Lambeth this year—with the exception of refuse collection and street cleaning, because a contract has been placed for those and therefore no cut in the level of support is possible.

That means cuts in the provisions made for sportsmen and for disabled people, for children attending day nursery schools and for pensioners. People hoping to go to college who are not on a mandatory grant and people hoping to go into business—goodness knows, we need people able to go into business in inner city areas—will suffer cuts. There will be a cut in discretionary grants and the business advisory service is to be abolished.

With the two exceptions that I mentioned, whichever service one considers, the quality of life in Lambeth will be degraded as a consequence of this order. The quality of our life has been degraded enough already. In the past 12 months, the Government have been responsible for an increase in unemployment of 40 per cent. in Lambeth. The same people who suffered the 40 per cent. increase in unemployment—to an average level in my constituency of just below 25 per cent.—will have their standard of life degraded in another way because of the cuts in services which wil be necessary as a result of the order.

The unlucky number in Lambeth is not 13 but 25—about 25 per cent. of the people eligible to work are unemployed, about 25 per cent. of the population are on income support, and about 25 per cent. of primary school children need special care and attention. The hon. Member for Streatham will confirm that that is the figure given by teachers in our primary schools.

The quality of our life has therefore suffered considerably already, yet we have to put up with this order as well. For some years, the Government have regarded Lambeth as rebellious—*[Interruption.]* I must correct the impression given by the hon. Member for Streatham that the national executive of the Labour party has suspended or expelled those 13 people either as members or as councillors. I see that there is a member of the national executive on the Labour Front Bench. My advice would be to show a yellow card to those councillors and then put the matter behind them. That is done, sensibly, by football referees and I hope that it will be done by the national executive of the Labour party.

I represent not councils or councillors, but my constituents. The Government have considered Lambeth a rebellious council for some years and are acting like others who have put down rebellions. The Romans, not content with having put down the Spartacus rebellion, carried out thousands of crucifixions afterwards. At the Monmouth rebellion—not the one last week, but the one in 1685—the Government of the day were not content with putting down the rebellion but continued to hunt for well-meaning men and women in order to sacrifice them. Indeed, there is quite a history of association because those who rebelled in 1685 were proved right by 1688. In the same way, those who opposed the poll tax in 1988 have been proved right in 1991. A further historical association is that both Lambeth and Somerset, where the Monmouth rebellion was put down, were rate capped.

I conclude my speech with a list of the sacrifices that will take place in Lambeth services. Thank goodness, as a result of the increase in the rate cap level, Streatham pool will be saved, but two other lidos and a public bath will be

lost. Our library facilities will also be cut. That will be a matter of concern to you, Mr. Speaker, as the facility at Upper Norwood library was available to your constituents and mine. Only this morning I received a letter from an organisation called Amity Reading Club, which deals with literacy provision and social counselling for adults with special learning difficulties. Its classes at the Carnegie library in Herne Hill are to be discontinued as a result of capping. The caretaking facility at the library is also to be cut, so voluntary organisations will no longer be able to meet there when the library is closed.

Lambeth's youth service will be cut by 40 per cent. Those of us who represent constituencies in which there have twice been riots want to put resources into such services. We also want to protect statutory education services, and Lambeth has been forced to cut adult education. I am not talking about degree courses but courses on, for example, ceramics, cooking or sewing, which may make a vital difference to the quality of life of some people and may even inspire them for the rest of their lives. The arts in Lambeth will also suffer enormously as a result of poll tax capping.

Sir William Shelton: I have much sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, but does he agree that, although Wandsworth and Lambeth have more or less the same population, leaving aside teachers and education staff, Lambeth employs some 9,000 people while Wandsworth employs only about 5,500? That additional 4,500 people —presumably members of important unions in Lambeth —represent a very heavy cost on those who live in Lambeth.

Mr. Fraser: The difference between the authorities is that in Wandsworth, for good or ill, people voted for cuts, whereas in Lambeth, for good or ill, people did not vote for cuts. That is the difference that Ministers choose to ignore.

I was concluding with a list of sacrifices. There will be cuts in education. This morning, I had a letter from King's College school of medicine and dentistry which said that, as a result of capping, Lambeth has decided that it will have to withdraw one full-time teacher who works closely with children from five to 16 in King's College hospital. Playgroups and day nurseries will have to be sacrificed. Business advisory services, consumer advice services and voluntary advice services will have to be closed.

Head teachers have written to me, including one who recently wrote from a Church of England school, Christchurch school. The letter said that, because of the cut in teaching staff, teachers would simply not be able to perform the job properly.

Second-chance education, which is important in a borough with a high level of unemployment and deprivation, will suffer, as will adult education. Someone came to see me on Friday who had paid his own money to undertake a first degree and so deserved to get his first grant for his second degree, but that was disallowed because the money was not available as a result of capping. One could go on talking about cuts in community services and in the provision of community halls.

One of the most touching incidents was when I marched through the streets with my constituents recently for a partly voluntary organisation called Centre 70. Everyone receives good value for money because much of the work is unpaid. As a result of the 20 per cent. cut across the board in voluntary services in Lambeth, that centre will have to lose a good value for money scheme for the elderly and frail. Somebody said to me, "Mr. Fraser, what can I do? I have worked 16 years of my life for this organisation and as a result of the cuts I shall lose my job." That is the sort of degradation of the quality of life in my borough that is occurring as a result of the measure.

I have not come to the Chamber to argue for high levels of taxation or poll tax. One way in which we could have resolved the difficulty would have been to relate the average £140 per person poll tax reduction scheme to the level of need from one borough to another. However, the reduction scheme follows exactly the same pattern as the poll tax—it is a per capita reduction, unrelated to need. If the Government had thought to apply it to need and to take from people according to their ability to pay, the measure would not have been necessary and I should not have had to make the complaints that I have made today. The order represents a negation of democracy and a severe attack on nearly all the people I represent.

9.43 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) as I have some experience of Lambeth. A close friend of mine lives in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and has attempted three times to pay last year's poll tax bill by writing to Lambeth council. Each time, the council failed to respond. He is a willing payer, waiting to pay. He has paid the bill on the supposition of what the figure should be for part of the year. What is the Labour party's solution to the problem of London? Today, the Labour party published the policies of a future Labour Government. They plan to introduce another tier of Government, another burden on the very people about whom the hon. Gentleman has just been talking which will cost millions of pounds.

I represent a constituency in which both tiers—Avon county council and Bristol city council—were capped last year. We heard all sorts of threats of Armageddon. My hon. Friend the Minister of State identified the reality. However, I also represent a constituency which, like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), is partly within a city and partly without it.

There is no doubt that Bristol is an inefficient authority. The burden for the average community charge payer in Bristol because of the non-collection factor is £40. In Kingswood, the other half of my constituency, that burden is less than £10. Therefore, in that respect, Bristol is at least four times less efficient than its neighbouring local authority.

This evening I shall relate most of my comments to the implications of what would happen if no capping system were available to the Government.

On 25 April, I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition to ask him what would be the implications of having no system of capping. I asked him to confirm that

> "if there were no limits as you suggest, my constituents could face ever increasing demands since both Councils' spending would be limitless"—

that is, the expenditure of both Avon and Bristol. I continued:

> "Could you please clarify this apparent contradiction, and could you please confirm your continued commitment to a second level of local government in the form of 'Regional Parliaments'."

[Mr. Robert Hayward]

On 10 March, I received a reply from the right hon. Gentleman's office. Let me quote it in full:

"Mr Kinnock has asked me to thank you for your letter of April 25th.

The Labour Party's position on the matters that you raise has been set out in great detail, and I refer you to the relevant documentation."

The letter did not say what the "relevant documentation" was. I went to the Library and asked for the Labour party documentation, which was accordingly provided.

The capping question—which, according to the Leader of the Opposition, was discussed "in great detail"—is covered in 12 lines. I do not want the House to get the wrong impression. I do not mean 12 full lines on an A4 sheet of paper; I mean 12 half-lines. Those 12 lines confirm that there will be no form of capping.

In his opening speech, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that the sum involved was a puny £40 million——

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): It is £38·9 million.

Mr. Hayward: I accept that figure. I was quoting the figure used by the hon. Gentleman's colleague. That is the figure in the order, although it is not the figure that we would be debating had not the Government given a clear indication of what the capping levels would be.

Avon county council, for example, set its figure minimally below the capping level to ensure that it would avoid being capped, and many other authorities did the same. The Labour party cannot say that we are debating only £40 million, or £38·9 million; by implication, we are debating many more millions of pounds. Labour should state clearly how it would cope with that excess expenditure, rather than merely commenting on the capping order. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has said that no extra finance would be available. Where, then, will the money come from—whether it is £40 million, £100 million or £200 million? Labour is committed to providing not a penny extra for local government expenditure in the first year. Where the money will come from for the extra tier of government in London is another question.

I have a copy of Labour's document with me. It contains not only the party's proposals in relation to regional government——

Ms. Primarolo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are we discussing the Labour party's document—which I am more than happy to do—or the capping order for named English authorities?

Mr. Speaker: We are discussing exactly what is in the order. It is legitimate to find connections, but I think that we must stick to the subject of the order.

Mr. Hayward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was attempting to explain what the implications would be if the order were not available to the Government. That is important to my constituents, whose bills last year were reduced by——

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

Mr. Hayward: It is clear that the Labour party is worried about the implications of not having capping orders available to it, because of the impact that that would have on my constituents and many others across the country.

Labour's document states:

"We believe there is a case for at least some salaried councillors . . . we will explore ways of compensating employers for releasing staff for council business."

Community charge payers would face those added burdens if capping were not available. They have not been costed or identified but appear only as promises. The Labour party will not say where the money will come from, despite the hon. Member for Derby, South saying that no more money is available.

I welcome the order. We were told a year ago that we faced Armageddon, but that did not prove to be so. It is important to identify why the Labour party's policy document does not propose capping and to consider the implications of that. It would mean limitless bills, as I said in my letter to the Leader of the Opposition, but to which he failed to reply.

9.50 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): In an entertaining speech, the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) failed to say that many thousands of his constituents live in Broadland and take advantage of Norwich services but do not pay for them. I understood him to say that I would be better employed canvassing in Norwich than representing my constituents in the House. If I have got that wrong, I shall give way to him. No doubt that will attract a fair amount of comment in Norwich tomorrow.

We have been hearing much lately about lying in elections. I do not intend to use the word "lies" or "lying", but in the May elections the Conservative party issued a leaflet headed, "Some things you should know before you vote on May 2nd." It said that Labour had

"put up your Community Charge by £68·00 this year."

That is a blatant misrepresentation, because Norwich city council increased poll tax bills by £6. It also said that Labour-controlled Norwich city council has

"the highest level of rent arrears and empty Council houses in East Anglia."

That is not true.

The Conservatives of Norwich offered to

"lower the Community Charge by a further £68",

which as far as I can calculate would wipe out the city council, and to

"reduce the number of homeless by better management of council houses—hundreds are lying empty",

whereas the number of empty council houses in Norwich is below the Government guideline. The killer is that they would

"construct the relief road for Bowthorpe."

Having proposed to cut council services, they try to bribe the electorate by announcing that they will construct a road, but I do not know where they would get the money from. It did not do them any good because, once again, they were wiped out in the local elections: they came third in Norwich. That is a pity, because I should rather see an active and flourishing Conservative party in the city of Norwich. At least it is a political party, not a collection of pressure groups like the Liberals.

Leaving aside the contradiction between poll tax capping and local government accountability, which has been discussed in the House for ages, I simply want to put the record straight about Norwich city council and will

quote some figures. I shall carefully avoid what the Minister called hyperbole and exaggeration—tautology if ever I heard it.

The city council proposed a prudent and realistic budget of £18·75 million. That would have meant an increase of £6 a head to cover city services. Tory-controlled Norfolk county council raised its costs by £53, and by £9 a head to cover the cost of late payment of the poll tax. Once again, the city's increase was below inflation. Norwich city council's part of rates and poll tax bills has increased by less than the rate of inflation for 10 years. There was a 58 per cent. increase between 1982 and 1991, compared with a 68 per cent. increase in the retail prices index.

The city's proposed increase included spending an extra £2 million as a result of Government action: the extra cost of collecting the poll tax and running poll tax benefits, £1·5 million; taking over street cleaning and other responsibilities from the county, £200,000; the extra costs for the Government's litter code in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, £100,000; and Government cuts in housing benefit subsidy, £150,000. To keep the bills down, the council used £2·25 million of its reserves. The council has a two-year plan to ensure that it has enough reserves to cover emergencies and to cope with normal cash flow. That has been approved by the Audit Commission as a way of managing the city council's cash flows.

There is no doubt that Norwich spends above its standard spending assessment, but the surrounding districts spend well below theirs because the city provides services that also meet their needs. When the Government changed from rates to the poll tax, their assessment of how much Norwich needed went down by 5·9 per cent., whereas the average for district councils throughout England increased by 11·2 per cent. Without that change, Norwich would have spent up to £17·5 million without being capped—£1 million more than it had planned to spend.

Under last year's Government rules, the council could have spent £20 million without being capped. The changes meant that this year Norwich was liable to capping if it spent more than £15 million. No council can be capped —as we have already heard—if it spends less than £15 million, but that figure has not been changed since it was introduced and has not been kept in line with inflation. The Government told Norwich to cut until it spent only 13·7 per cent. above its SSA. Other capped authorities have been allowed to spend between 17·5 per cent. and 82·6 per cent. above their SSAs. The council has repeatedly asked the Government how they work out the amount by which capped authorities should cut their budgets so that it can determine whether the city council has been treated fairly. However, the Government have persistently refused to give that information.

To cut the council's budget by £1·5 million to £15 million would mean a maximum of £16 a head or 31p a week off the bills in the city. The thousands of people who pay only 20 per cent. of the poll tax bills would benefit by only 6p a week. Although little more than half the poll tax payers in Norwich will see little or no benefit from the city being capped, they will see a reduction in services as cuts have to be made to get down to £15 million. Norwich's levels of spending have been endorsed every year in local elections and, as I said, for the past 55 years Norwich city has elected a Labour council and now has the biggest-ever majority in its history.

The Government's attitude shows that they do not understand the peculiarities of Norwich. Their SSA for districts such as Norwich is based almost entirely on the number of people living in the council's area. In Norwich, that was taken to be 117,000 whereas the county thinks that it is 120,000. However, the city is a regional capital serving an urban, built-up area of 180,000 people. It has a sub-regional population of 286,000, a travel-to-work area of 300,000 people and a shopping catchment area of 600,000 people. It provides recreation, sports, cultural and marketing facilities for a large part of the county of Norfolk. It also acts as a focus for social needs in the county, for example, for the homeless. One hundred homeless people sleep on the streets every night, having been drawn into the city from the surrounding suburbs and rural areas.

Norwich is not only a regional capital, but it has far greater spending needs on, for example, traffic management because of its medieval street pattern. Norfolk county council has always underfunded traffic work, so the city has to make up the expenditure. Of the 11 traffic staff —theoretically a county responsibility—only four are paid for by the county. The city's work on traffic management, meanwhile, has been praised by Ministers at the Department of the Environment.

Norwich has an enormous cost burden from its historic heritage buildings. I do not know why the hon. Member for Norwich, North talks them down because he has none —they are all in my constituency. The city has 1,500 listed buildings, of which 250 are owned by the city council. It has the largest collection of medieval churches in Europe. The bill for outstanding repairs for city-owned heritage properties is £6 million. The council also has to make large grants to private owners and to trusts to keep the buildings in good repair. It is always difficult to sell heritage properties with structural problems and it is especially difficult now. The budget had to reflect all those demands, but it still came up with a standstill on city council-determined services. It managed the absorption of inflation on supplies and services, it managed the absorption of new Government spending requirements, such as those in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it maintained a prudent level of reserves and it provided appropriate contingency levels.

Norwich has special costs because it is a regional capital and a historic city, and it has to meet the social and recreational needs of at least half a county. It produced a modest and sensible budget. The Audit Commission said:

"The council faces considerable pressure on both its revenue and capital finances because of the threat of community charge capping and the new capital control system. . . I am satisfied that the council is taking the necessary steps to keep its finances in a sound position."

That is an objective view from an auditor. It was a modest and sensible budget; the Minister's decision is ill-informed and spiteful. He has made his decision simply because Norwich is an effective and well-managed Labour-controlled city.

10 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers for the almost £3 million additional funding in revenue support grant which they have made available to the county of Warwickshire. The Warwickshire cap was originally set at £272·3 million; on appeal, it has been

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raised to £275·1 million. Clearly, that is a substantial benefit to my constituents and to those who live in Warwickshire.

The five Warwickshire Members have met my right hon. and hon. Friends on a number of occasions. I take this opportunity to thank especially my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities for the courteous and friendly way in which he has listened to our arguments. Clearly, he has not just listened; he has taken our representations on board. I say to him with all the sincerity that I can command that we are grateful to him for that and, in addition, we are grateful for the lifting of the cap to £275·1 million.

I still, however, remain in some disagreement with my right hon. and hon. Friends. When the community charge was introduced, the buzz word was "accountability". The theory was that the charge would make local authorities more accountable to their electorates. I cannot see how capping achieves that laudable objective.

In Warwickshire, a saving of £16 per head would have occurred as a result of the cap being applied. But the effect of last Thursday's announcement will reduce that figure to £9. That £9 is insignificant when compared with the Government's £140 reduction in the gross amount of community charge.

My constituents have made it abundantly clear to me in more than 250 letters, in innumerable conversations, in meetings and in deputations that they would have preferred a reasonable level of service to be maintained, especially in education, rather than to have had a modest reduction in the community charge bill of some £9 per head. There is, however, another and perhaps even more powerful reason for my disquiet—and I made the point in my intervention in the admirable speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith).

In January 1990, I voted against the revenue support grant. On 29 January this year, I voted against the RSG. I am not anxious to make it three in a row. It is a hat trick that I can well do without. I very much hope, therefore, that in putting down a marker tonight my right hon. and hon. Friends will reconsider and will make the necessary adjustments to the standard spending assessment formula which will enable Warwickshire to obtain a fair shake and a sensible revenue support allocation. Such an allocation must be seen to be fair and to reflect more accurately the needs and responsibilities of the county of Warwickshire and its residents.

I want to pursue the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington. He suggested that it would be extremely helpful if the five Warwickshire Members of Parliament—and four are present in the Chamber—met my right hon. Friend to discuss the way in which the formula operates. Clearly there are major problems with the way in which funding is directed to our county. It would be of great benefit if we could have a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister. I see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding his agreement, and I am grateful to him.

As I have said before in the House, Warwickshire is not a high-spending or profligate local authority. It clearly cannot be compared with the likes of Lambeth, Rochdale or Bristol. Some of the horror stories that we have heard tonight are appalling, but Warwickshire, thank goodness, is not in that league. Warwickshire has a reasonable but not extravagant level of service and the authority is generally efficient. The problem which faces Warwickshire is to balance the desire to remain within Government limits and at the same time to provide a service which is acceptable to the majority of the people of Warwickshire.

Everything hinges on the amount of Government grant, and if the rate support grant is much lower than that which is provided to similar and neighbouring authorities then clearly Warwickshire will need to obtain more from its charge payers. But if it seeks to do that, it will be capped. It is a classic Catch 22 situation. Apparently, the only solution left is to reduce the level and quality of services being provided in the county, and that is not in accordance with the wishes of the majority of those living in Warwickshire

Warwickshire county council would welcome the opportunity of being held truly accountable to its electorate for the level of its community charge. It is certain that it knows what its electorate wants, and that is not a £9 per head reduction at the expense of education or the police. As I said earlier, I base that statement on my postbag and that of my colleagues. Warwickshire people do not wish to see a reduction in services.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton) *rose*——

Mr. Pawsey: I shall be delighted to give way again to my hon. Friend. He has a deserved reputation in this House and in his constituency for being an assiduous Member of Parliament.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those kind words. Does he agree that one of the difficulties facing the county is that, because of the number of motorways and other happenings there, we require more police, but in the current circumstances we may not be given the posts for which we have applied to the Home Office?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. He takes the words from my mouth, but that will not stop me repeating them.

I am not an uncritical supporter of Warwickshire, and those who were present in the Chamber last Tuesday for the debate on grant-maintained schools will know that I was highly critical of the county council's education committee. The way in which it seeks to dissuade schools from applying for grant-maintained status is completely wrong. It is as wrong on that issue as the Government are on the amount of Warwickshire's revenue support grant, and that is harsh criticism indeed.

Even with the extra £3 million being provided by the Government, there will be a reduction in the number of teachers in my constituency and a resultant increase in class size. Naturally, parents are dismayed. During the Conservative administration in shire hall residents have seen a steady improvement in education standards and it will be unfortunate if that improvement, in some areas at least, is halted.

However, the effects of capping are not just being felt on the education service. They also occur in the police—the very point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens). As my hon. Friend said, there is a real irony here. For some years, the five Warwickshire Members of Parliament have been seeking to increase the establishment of the police in Warwickshire. Our efforts have borne fruit. This year, there has been an increase in

the establishment by some eight officers but, sadly, it seems that they will not now be recruited. Even worse, it seems that there is a risk that we shall lose police officers in Warwickshire. The chief constable has made it clear that there will be insufficient funds to pay police overtime.

I wish to quote from an article that appeared in my local newspaper, the admirable *Rugby Advertiser*. The editor of the *Rugby Advertiser* wrote:

"Warwickshire experienced the second highest rise in crime in Britain last year. And in the last four months 25 men and two women officers were injured while policing our streets. The attacks were almost double the figures of the preceding year. These figures are published in the wake of a grim warning from Chief Constable Peter Joslin that if the force has to bear further financial cuts in its budget, the overtime element will disappear and, he believes, the police will have lost control of the streets of the county."

That is a pretty damning indictment. On the one hand —this point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington —the Home Office believes that more officers are necessary effectively to police the county. On the other hand, the Department of the Environment will not allow the authority the funds necessary to pay them. That highlights the paradox. The Home Office certainly does not think that Warwickshire is wasteful or profligate with resources, manpower or money. If it did, it would not have approved the increase in establishment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington referred to the anomalies within the formula. It is necessary for my right hon. and hon. Friends to produce a standard spending assessment that is fair if we are to avoid exactly this same row next year. I do not suggest that the administration of Warwickshire county council is perfect. It is not. There is always room for improvement. Equally, however, the county is not particularly wasteful. Those who run its affairs are conscientious and provide good value for money. I quote from a letter that I received only today from the leader of Warwickshire county council. County Councillor Vereker says:

"Did you realise that by budgeting to underclaim over £60,000 of the personal allowances to which we are entitled by law, we are indirectly funding about 5 teachers out of our personal allowances!"

That shows just how conscientious the local authority and its councillors are.

I take no pleasure in voting against my own Government, and I certainly hope that this will be the last time on this issue.

10.13 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Given the lateness of the hour and the fact that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, I shall make my remarks as brief as I can.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr Hayward)—as did the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities when he opened the debate—quoted a National and Local Government Officers Association report about the effects last year of capping. Bristol was capped last year. It is capped again this year. I do not know whether the association has got it wrong or whether the Minister has only partially read the report. Many effects were felt in local authorities such as Bristol. For instance, no vacancies were filled in Bristol. There was also a massive increase in taxi licences and parking fees. Furthermore, there was a massive increase in street licences for traders.

Repairs on housing were made subject to a cash-limited budget. Installation of central heating for those who desperately needed it on health grounds was also cash limited. When the money ran out, the services ceased to be provided, regardless of need.

The speeches made in tonight's debate echo only half of the discussion. Needs and services do not feature in the speeches made by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) made a direct speech and made clear how he intended to vote. But it is not good enough for he and his colleagues to say that the formula is right when it penalises Labour authorities but wrong when it penalises Conservative authorities. The issue at the centre of the debate is the functioning of local authorities and how services are provided.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) spoke earlier in the debate. It is regrettable that even after the figures that he used were corrected in an intervention he persisted in using another series of figures which misrepresented the position in Bristol. For example, he quoted the amount of money that is spent on collecting the poll tax and administering the benefits. He failed to mention the measures that the city has taken to help people who do not have bank accounts to pay it by facilitating payment at post offices.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West gave an estimated figure instead of the real figure for the cost of collecting the poll tax. The real figure is £14·65. That is below the average cost of £15 in the metropolitan authorities and the big 11 with which we are comparable. The hon. Gentleman then referred to the loss of money on community charge collection. He said that my figures were wrong and that he would use the Audit Commission's figures. I have the Audit Commission figures. The figure for Bristol is £10 per head, and the average for the big nine cities is £14 per head. So Bristol is no worse than most cities.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West then referred to rent arrears. In Bristol rent arrears are running at 10 per cent. The average for similar authorities is 12 per cent. Non-payment of the poll tax and an increase in rent arrears in a city such as Bristol is caused by people's poverty. My constituency has the highest rate of long-term unemployment in the region. People who simply do not have the money cannot pay.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West said that he did not attack the integrity of the officers of the authority. He then proceeded to challenge all the figures that they have provided. I refer specifically to the provision for non-payment in Bristol. The Government recommend that the provision should be about 5 per cent., which would be £22 per head. The advice of the treasurer to elected council members from all parties in Bristol was that provision should be about 7·5 per cent. If elected members deliberately ignore the advice that is given to them by their officers, they become liable under various pieces of legislation for possible surcharge for not taking the relevant advice. It is not true or fair for the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West to say that Labour members are dangerous, footloose and fancy free with the authority's expenditure.

The position in Bristol is simple. The problem is with the standard spending assessment, to which many Conservative Members have referred this evening. Despite all the protestations of Conservative Members, the

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difference, alas, between the Labour and the Conservative budgets was a matter of a few million pounds. A Conservative administration in Bristol would also have been capped. This year, Bristol has been capped below the level at which it was capped last year. In other words, the cap has been tightened, and inflation has cut into expenditure. No account has been taken of the special position in which Bristol finds itself because of its dock; no account has been taken of the fact that Bristol is compared with authorities other than those with which it is comparable; no account has been taken of the fact that the Department operates on the basis of information and statistics that are so out of date that they bear no resemblance to what is happening.

Before the all-party delegation lobbied the Minister, it asked for a meeting with the city's Members of Parliament. I and two Conservative Members attended. I assume that the hon. Member for Kingswood was unable to be there. There was agreement across the political parties that the capping was unjust, that it would destroy services, that the SSA was wrong, that no account had been taken of the dock, and that the Government were simply using the wrong information. It is truly astonishing that Conservative Members should contradict their Bristol council colleagues and the leader of the council.

There will be cuts in Bristol's services. There will be cuts in economic development measures as we plunge further into recession, and as the unemployment rate continues to rise. Desperately needed environmental projects will be cut, as will the advice-giving agencies in the community sector and the voluntary sector. There will also be cuts in the arts, including provision for the Old Vic. Yet this is an area in which Conservative Members, including the Secretary of State for Health, have made a vigorous case for increased expenditure. Swimming pools will be closed, and there may have to be reduced provision for concessionary bus fares. Bristol will have to reduce its services to the bare statutory level.

This is no way to finance local authorities. If Bristol had received from the Government the same grant per head as did Wandsworth, there would be no poll tax there. Indeed, each poll tax payer would get a rebate of about £300, or, alternatively, the authority would have many millions of pounds of additional money to spend. There is a question that Conservative Members of Parliament representing the city of Bristol will have to answer: why did they vote to give the people of Wandsworth more than the people who sent them to this Chamber? Capping is a disgrace, and I shall vote against it with pleasure.

10.22 pm

Mr. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): It was worth forgoing my dinner tonight for the opportunity to express in the Chamber the profound relief of my constituents and the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) that the Minister has had the good sense to keep Basildon capped. Basildon is one of two Labour councils with which my constituents are afflicted. The other is Thurrock, which is very little better than Basildon. Of course, Basildon is notorious for the way in which it disregards its puppets—the community charge payers. It is the fifth most extravagant council in the country, and if it were not for the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we should be faced with a community charge of almost £500. That is an absolute disgrace, given the fact that many people in my constituency and in the constituency of Basildon work hard but do not earn particularly high incomes.

The ruthlessness and cunning of Basildon council, which is marginally Labour—but only marginally—is displayed tonight by the fact that it has circulated to Labour Members a letter threatening to close services to the elderly and to children at the same time as it fritters away money on massive subsidies on such extravagances as the Towngate theatre. The council, which should be able to provide a standard level of services for £12 million, budgeted for £26 million. Only the good sense of the Government has held that figure down to £23 million. Fortunately, because of the Government's intervention with the subsidy of £140 and the additional capping, the charge will be little more than £300. At least that amount is manageable for most people.

Basildon council is one of the most spendthrift councils in the country. It recently borrowed £12 million to build a great white elephant of a theatre that costs us £2 million a year in interest charges alone, and £500,000 a year in subsidy. Meanwhile, pavements in other parts of the constituency are cracked, broken and dangerous. The council does not give two hoots about that. The grass verges at the sides of the streets remain uncut, and people are threatened with the closure of the local swimming pool that their children use. That is what Basildon council thinks of the people who foot the bills.

The council spends more than £0·25 million on its public relations exercise—heaven knows, it needs it; its reputation in our area is atrocious. Of course, at the local elections this month the voters showed the council what they thought of its charges and services and there was a 9 per cent. swing to the Tories. We took two Labour seats in wards that were old-style Labour strongholds, and we won another seat from the Liberal Democrats. We reduced the Labour majority to a margin of one. This time next year I shall be able to report to the House that at last Basildon council and its supporters will be relieved of the incubus of the old-style, callous Labour administration under which we have laboured so long.

Among the council's other extravagances is a newsletter —supposedly an information sheet—called *Basildon Link*. Some £62,000 a year is spent on that in an area where three excellent free newspapers come through our doors and there are two local newspapers that we can buy for 20p. *Basildon Link*, supposedly a neutral information sheet, ran the headline, "Heseltine's tax horror" above its report on the community charge. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to comment specifically on the following extract from that article. It says that the Government have

"not once discussed the financial plight of Basildon with councillors".

I believe that that statement is extremely economical with the truth, and I shall ask my hon. Friend to tell us categorically whether it is true.

The real reason why councils such as Basildon cost so much is their notoriously wasteful use of staff. Basildon's labour costs are astronomical. It employs 44 per cent. more staff per 1,000 of the population than any other council in the group of councils which the Audit Commission designates as having a similar population. Basildon is one of the most overstaffed councils in the country. It operates all the old Spanish practices—

overmanning, feather-bedding and Mickey Mouse-isms —which once existed in old-style industries such as printing.

Such councils cost so much because they cater not for the community but for the National and Local Government Officers Association and Transport and General Workers Union barons who still rule them, although in Basildon that will not be true for much longer.

Basildon spends nearly £1·5 million just to run the town hall, without the services, and on top of that it runs area offices all over the place—there are eight of them.

In the town of Billericay, with a population of about 36,000 souls, there are 12 full-time staff to cater for them. As the Member covering Billericay and a great deal more and with an electorate of almost 90,000 souls, I manage my day's work with one and a half members of staff. That is an indication of the wastefulness which the council inflicts on our voters.

While these enormous sums of money are being wasted on flapdoodle like the *Basildon Link* and the Towngate theatre, real needs in our constituencies go wanting. We need a level crossing in the town of Wickford over a very dangerous railway, but we cannot have it. The money has gone to subsidise the Towngate theatre. We need a community hall in the town of Billericay, but we cannot have it. The money has gone for a £1·5 million subsidy to the town hall in Basildon. We need our pavements repairing, the verges cutting and the swimming pool to be kept open on a regular basis. All these things are denied to us by the accountant, so-called, Mr. Ballard, who, as I have already pointed out, has got not only our finances in a mess but those of Walworth road as well. So I am here this evening to say on behalf of my constituents that we are extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for what he has done.

In the town of Basildon, next to the monstrous town hall and between it and the Towngate theatre is another little office, which contains the staff who run our local bus service, the Thamesway bus service, which is part of the Badgerline. That bus service, which was bought out by the people who work for it and travels 13 million miles a year, with 300 buses, £80 million a year turnover and 1,000 staff, has an office staff of eight people. That is the private sector for you!

I am quite sure that the Government's measures, coupled with next year's election, will see the end of this bunch, and I say thank you to the Secretary of State for helping us on our way.

10.33 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): The House is always entertained by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and the overexcitement of the orange box, or soap box, that she climbs on. She said one thing that intrigued me when she waved the local paper. The headline in that paper, as I saw it flashing in her hands, was "Our fate in his hands". That seems to sum up the debate tonight, because the fate of many people in all the authorities that are to be capped is in the hands of the Government.

The question before the House is, should the spending of the authorities named in the order be determined and restrained by Whitehall? Should it be determined by the Government? Have Ministers got their figures right and can they justify those figures? Having listened to the Minister of State opening the debate and to this hon. Friends speaking from the Benches behind him, I remain totally unconvinced that he has got his figures right and that he can justify taking central Government powers to control local authorities in this way.

I speak tonight to try to explain to the Minister of State why the cap, particularly in relation to Stoke-on-Trent city council, is unfair and unjust and will damage local services; and to seek an explanation from the Under-Secretary when he winds up of how this has come about. The right hon. Gentleman knows that Stoke-on-Trent set a budget last year of £28 million and that the Government claim that this is excessive—so excessive that it must be cut. But he knows also that 12 months ago the Minister took a similar look at Stoke-on-Trent and said that it would be appropriate and proper for the city council to spend £33·75 million. That is over £5 million more than the council was proposing to spend this year. How does the Minister explain that last year it was appropriate for Stoke-on-Trent to spend over £33 million while this year anything over £25·72 million is a disaster, so much so that Stoke-on-Trent and its people must be punished? Have the circumstances of the city changed so acutely in the Government's view? I shall be interested to hear the Minister's response because I am confused. I suspect that the people of Stoke-on-Trent are confused by the Government's change of mind over the past 12 months.

When the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities responded to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), he offered a hurried and garbled explanation of the indicators, as he saw them, behind the standard spending assessment. He mentioned several indicators and seemed to say that circumstances had changed. He picked on the city's housing investment programme allocation. It has indeed changed, and the Minister scored an own goal. Last year the allocation was £17·7 million and this year the Government cut it to £14·5 million. The circumstances have changed and, unfortunately, they have worsened for Stoke-on-Trent. The Government reduced the HIP allocation and decided that the city should spend less this year. There seems to be no logic in that.

I am sure that the Minister listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who spelt out the realities of housing in Stoke-on-Trent, which, sadly, have not changed much over the past year. The city has twice the average rate of houses that do not have a bathroom. It has three times the national average rate of houses without a WC. About 53 per cent. of the city's houses are substandard. Homelessness is rising, and during the winter young people were sleeping on the streets. Things are becoming worse, yet the Government say that less should be spent than that which was expended a year ago. There is no logic in that.

The Minister and his colleagues know the realities of health in Stoke-on-Trent. The Minister for Health visited the city recently to examine in detail its health profile, which has not changed since 1910. The city suffers from industrial diseases. Men in my constituency, and the other Stoke constituences, have a small chance of living long enough to pick up their pension. Those are realities that have not changed, yet the Government say that the city should spend less this year than last year. I find that extremely difficult to justify and I look forward to the Minister's explanation.

If the Government cannot justify the reduction in the SSA, on what other basis can they explain their treatment of the people of Stoke? The Minister said that the city was spending more than comparable authorities, but the authorities with which he chose to compare the city were Staffordshire district authorities. Surely the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment cannot seriously say that the problems facing a major industrial city such as Stoke are to be compared with those of Staffordshire, Moorlands, for example. A comparison should be made with other industrial cities in the big nine. I am glad that the Minister nods his head. My right hon. and hon. Friends have already said that spending levels per year in their constituencies are far in excess of the figure for Stoke. The city is at the bottom of the league with a spending level of £128.

Leicester is a comparable but rather wealthier city, with higher levels of income. Its spending is appropriate at £237. How does the Minister explain the difference between the two cities? The logic of the Government's argument is that services cost 85 per cent. more to be delivered in Leicester than in Stoke. The Under-Secretary knows that that is not true. It does not cost 85 per cent. more to deliver the same services in Leicester than in Stoke, but it seems that that is what SSA is all about. The Government know that they are engaging in Alice-in-Wonderland economies. The figures do not add up. Indeed, when a realistic view is taken of them, they are seen to be nonsense.

So the figure cannot have been reached on a comparative basis. It certainly cannot be on the basis that Stoke-on-Trent is profligate. When I and my hon. Friends met the Under-Secretary a few weeks ago, with the city council leaders, he was kind enough to compliment Stoke-on-Trent on the good, constructive and cautious use that it made of Government investment, for example, with the garden festival. We were grateful for that compliment from the Under-Secretary. Yet three weeks later he turns round and says that we are so profligate and excessive in our expenditure that we have to be capped. The Under-Secretary seems to have a very short memory if he cannot relate those two—a compliment on our extremely cautious and good behaviour when using Government investment, then suddenly saying we are excessive. Would he kindly explain that when he comes to the Dispatch Box?

The Under-Secretary may also say that there is a wise alternative and that there is another budget. However, he knows from the submission made to him when he received

the delegation from the city council that all the Conservative councillors supported the budget and our appeal against the poll tax. There was no alternative budget—it was a bipartisan view in Stoke-on-Trent, yet the Minister ignored it.

The Minister of State said that we were doing very well for Government grants. We are extremely grateful for anything that we can get from the Government. Last year, we got £147·60 per person from the Government. Had we got even *half* what Wandsworth got—I believe that it was £711 per person—in Government grants last year, we would not be in this position. How on earth can the Minister of State seriously say that the level of need in Wandsworth is so acute that it needs more than five times the amount of Government grant to cope with its difficulties than an industrial city like Stoke-on-Trent needs?

The Minister of State and the Under-Secretary know that those figures do not add up. There is no rational economic explanation for the SSAs that they have provided or for this order. The Minister knows that the real reason is political, yet despite that the Minister is saying that the SSA is a brilliant, precision tool that can identify dangerous overspending, which will damage the quality of life for everyone in this country unless it is restrained. So superb is the precision of that tool that it can identify £9·7 million worth of overspend nationally, out of a total spend by local authorities of £37 billion—that is precision to the point of 0·027 per cent. It is reassuring to hon. Members on both sides of the House to know that the Department of the Environment is so confident of its figures that it can home in with that accuracy and weed out 0·027 per cent. overspend around the country.

The truth is that the SSA is a shambles and the Government know it; and the poll tax is a shambles and is totally discredited. The Government do not believe in it any more and nor do the public, yet the Government are asking people in Stoke-on-Trent to accept it, without any explanation of how it has come about. We hope that the Under-Secretary will rectify that in a moment. That is damaging people in Stoke-on-Trent and in all local authorities that are affected by the order. I hope that the Government will be the most damaged because it is idiocies and hypocrisies like this which will see them thrown out at the general election.

10.43 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): It saddens me that Ipswich is one of the very few councils to be singled out for charge capping. I do not like to see my town rubbing shoulders with Lambeth and the other high spenders in what I regard as the league of shame. The hard truth is that Ipswich borough council has brought charge capping upon itself by financial irresponsibility and by excessive spending.

I believe that I can claim a degree of objectivity. I am no automatic apologist for the Government, especially on matters of local government finance. After all, I was one of the Conservative Members who rebelled and voted against the introduction of the poll tax. I also abstained in protest against the standard spending assessment set for Ipswich in the past financial year. But although I have been critical of the Government, I have also been strongly critical of overspending by Ipswich borough council, which last year exceeded its SSA by a staggering 96·3 per cent. and escaped capping only by a technicality.

This year the Government set much more realistic SSAs, and they received my support. Despite that more realistic approach, however, this year we in Ipswich find ourselves yet again saddled with one of the highest poll taxes in the country, and our borough council has again overshot its SSA by a significant margin—by a full 50 per cent., in fact. Overspending on this scale demands action by the Government, not to punish or oppress Ipswich borough council but to protect the Ipswich poll tax payer.

Naturally there are anxieties in Ipswich about the impact of charge capping. I met representatives of the National and Local Government Officers Association in Ipswich recently to discuss the issue. They stated their anxieties fairly and effectively. I have a good deal of sympathy with their anxieties, and I hope that job cuts can be avoided. In my view, the employees of the council are as much the victims of the financial unwisdom of the council as are Ipswich poll tax payers in general. It needs to be made clear that any unpalatable consequences of charge capping will be the fault not of the Government but of the borough council.

To put the cuts required of the council in perspective, the council is being required to cut its budget by £1·3 million, from £17·3 million to £16 million. Only a few months ago the Ipswich borough council handed over a brand new five-screen cinema centre that it had built for the Rank Organisation at a cost of £4·6 million to the council. That is more than three times the sum the council is being required to cut from its budget. And what did it get in return for the luxury cinema? It received from Rank an old cinema-cum-theatre suitable for live entertainment but in a poor state of repair and needing immediate expenditure of £600,000—and doomed, no doubt, to run at a loss year in, year out.

I described the £4·6 million five-screen cinema centre handed over by the council to Rank Organisation as a snip for the Rank Organisation but a heavy burden for the Ipswich poll tax payer. I stand by that description. This sort of grandiose, vainglorious project, this sort of gross overspending, is precisely why the Ipswich poll tax payer needs protection and why charge capping is, on occasion, necessary.

10.48 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The poll tax in the Wirral is high not because we have a profligate Labour administration. Indeed, in all the discussions between central Government and the local authority, on no occasion has anyone been able to produce any table of heads of major local authority expenditure that would put the Wirral near the top of the expenditure league. No, the reasons why our poll tax is high are as simple as they are deadly.

One of the reasons has already been touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo). She said that in Bristol, as in Wirral, if there were the same level of Government support as is given to Wandsworth, far from receiving poll tax bills, the poll tax payers would be picking up a cheque from the local authority or the Government. When the Under-Secretary

[Mr. Frank Field]

of State responds, will he say whether next year will bring justice to Wirral, as it has brought justice to Wandsworth in the past few years?

That is not the only reason why our poll tax is high. Another reason is that our level of grant is so much below that set for other districts such as Wandsworth. The budget for the previous year was set by a Tory-Liberal administration and had two peculiar aspects. First, the Tory leader thought that the budget should be set by telephone. With the help of a local newspaper, a phone-in was conducted and people were asked to pick figures out of the air for the level at which the poll tax should be set. The Tory leader then took a figure at which the poll tax could be set if all the local authority reserves were used up, and the poll tax was set at that level. We therefore enter the current financial year with no financial reserves and a false budget from which this year's calculations have been made.

The Tory leader knew that the authority could not run at a modest level of services, let alone a generous level, at the figure at which he had set the poll tax without using the financial reserves, so the level of the authority's spending is last year's budget minus those reserves. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): My hon. Friend can continue until 11 pm.

Mr. Field: I know that.

The second reason why the poll tax is high is therefore the Government have taken last year's fixed budget levels to work out what we should be spending this year.

There is a third reason why our poll tax is high, and it has nothing to do with the current Labour administration. There is overspending on the Merseyside police and the transport authority. In both cases, Wirral council has to levy the poll tax required by those two organisations to raise their budgets. If their budgets had been set at the level at which the Government said that they should have been set, there would have been no question of overspending in the Wirral.

Therefore, my third question to the Under-Secretary of State is this: next year, will he allow authorities such as the police and transport authorities, over which the council has no control, to set budgets way above their SSAs and thus throw Wirral's budget into confusion, or will he take some restraining measures?

I am mindful of the fact that Opposition Members wish to sum up fully, so I shall conclude on the following point. When Warwickshire Members asked if they could come to talk to the Secretary of State and his colleagues about the budget in their constituencies for next year, he quickly turned and nodded. I hope that the same facilities will be provided for Wirral Members. We are debating an authority with one Labour seat and three Tory seats, so the confusion into which Wirral's budget has been thrown affects far more Tory voters than Labour voters. Sometimes one needs to be political in the House, but I am concerned about all the charge payers.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will answer the three questions that I have posed. First, why has Wirral been treated as it has? Had we had anything like the deal secured by Tory Wandsworth—and three out of four of our seats are Tory—we should have been picking up cheques, not paying poll tax. Secondly, given that a near-crazy regime governed the setting of our poll tax by telephone and the raiding of reserves last year, will some adjustment be made to what the Government believe Wirral should spend to keep within its budget, even if it were the most responsible body on earth?

Despite all the pressures, had we not had to levy a poll tax for the regional transport authority and the police, we should still have been within the target that the Government had set us. My third question is therefore this: will the Government let those bodies levy whatever charges they choose, with the mayhem that that will bring, or will the Government take measures next year to ensure that the brave efforts made by the new Wirral administration, and the skill shown by our new leader in his negotiations with the Government, are able to bear fruit?

There was some confusion a moment ago, but I think that I was being told that I could speak until 11 pm. Having asked my three questions, however, I shall sit down early in the hope that in the extra four minutes people in the Wirral will be given some clear, positive and encouraging answers by the Under-Secretary of State.

10.56 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I am grateful to the Environment Ministers for the courtesy that they showed to Warwickshire Members by listening to their case, and for the easement of nearly £3 million that they granted the county. That takes it to within nearly 1 per cent. of the budget figure that was set and should allow the proposed cuts in services to be considerably modified. My hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) put Warwickshire's case forcefully and in some detail. Much of that case has been repeated several times to Ministers, and I have backed it at various meetings.

In the three minutes available to me, I should like to return to the standard spending assessment. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth mentioned a figure of £13 million, which originated in the changeover from rates to community charge. That seems to be the missing figure and it is one that crops up time and again.

If we compute the difference between the SSA set by the Government and Warwickshire's proposed budget for this year, we again encounter the figure of £13 million. On both sides of the House, questions remain about that SSA. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said today that he would extend the capping to many other councils, according to their budget figures, and I welcome that. Capping is inevitable; it is also the only way in which to control local government in the present circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities made the point forcefully. Had it not been for capping, it would have been almost impossible to contain local government spending in total for the year. Within the SSA mechanism, however, there is a danger of certain factors being exaggerated—factors that work slightly to the benefit of some authorities and slightly to the disadvantage of others.

I suggest that there should be a fine-tuning mechanism. Factors such as salaries should be taken more into account in SSAs. Police salaries, for instance, may not produce an appropriate average, because long-service employees may be at the top of the scale. Let me make another suggestion: as we move towards a time when authorities will spend less

than £15 million, it becomes more crucial to be in tune with the actualities rather than the averages that we have used until now. Unless we move to that, I fear that it will be difficult to ensure that the Government's assessment is fair and reasonable. I appreciate that the task is far from easy, but we must achieve it.

If the Government explain to people and to authorities how the SSAs are made up, we may, by modification, achieve an assessment that works and is acceptable. However, it must be fine-tuned far more than at present.

11 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Capping is neither necessary nor inevitable. The hon. Members for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) believe that we cannot survive without capping and that the economy, social life and democratic character of our nation depend on it, but that is patent, blatant, silly nonsense. We did not have capping between 1601 and 1985. The friction between central and local government in the mid-1980s, the enormous cuts in services that were forced on local government from the centre and the enormous cuts in grant that necessitated increases in rates to maintain even a basic service were caused entirely by Conservative Members and the Government. It was their fault that local and central government got into a state in the mid-1980s, and it will be their fault if, in the months between now and the delayed general election, that fiasco continues.

It is clear that the £38·9 million that allegedly will be "saved" by the order has nothing to do with rational judgment of the operation of democracy or the economy or a rational view of how to assess need, levels of service or value for money at local level. The £200 million that was squandered by the delayed decision at the end of March to adjust the amount of central Government money that goes into local authority coffers was a deliberate act to try to ensure that the local elections would not be a fiasco. The £4·3 billion that was cut on achieving the £140 flat-rate reduction was a deliberate effort to save Conservative party seats. That failed, and capping will merely add to the Conservatives' demise. But £38·9 million was spent, without justification, in a pathetic attempt to hold down essential public services.

I wish to deal, first, with the economic argument. I agreed with 99 per cent. of what my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said, except his notion that there is a role for central Government in determining the amount that should be raised and spent locally. That is not accepted in the bastion of private enterprise—the United States—and it should not be accepted anywhere else. There is no economic argument in terms of inflation, fiscal or macroeconomic policy for determining what a local authority raises and spends on local services. There are some fiscal and macro arguments on the amount of borrowing in the economy—the same arguments as apply to private-sector borrowing to build hypermarkets, shopping complexes and the leisure centres on which Conservative Members are so keen, but which are priced out of the reach of ordinary people. It is the same argument; in fact, it is a much better argument in terms of public spending because it is less inflationary.

Public spending tends to be on essential items; it tends not to generate imports; it tends to put work into the local economy, to be more directly employee-based and, therefore, to employ people. When people are employed, less is spent on social security benefits. When they have wages in their pockets and they are lifted by a national minimum wage out of the penury of having to claim benefits even though they are in work, they can pay their taxes and national insurance contributions. Therefore, money is put back into the coffers.

It makes sense from everyone's point of view to spend money on decent services, to give people jobs in which they can take pride rather than paying them to stay at home on the dole. Everybody knows that it makes sense. For every job that is lost through the poll tax capping exercise this year in the 14 authorities involved, there will be a price that we, as taxpayers, will have to pay.

£38·9 million will not be saved by this exercise—nor anything like it—because the money will be spent in other ways. It will be spent in not paying people to provide decent services for children in Warwickshire schools. It will be saved through the cut in the amount spent on the needs of the elderly in Lambeth, and it will be saved in terms of the miserable cuts in Basildon and Bristol which have been paraded tonight and of which the relevant Members of Parliament are so proud. It is difficult to take seriously the rantings of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) because she is one of the old guard which is supposed to be quiet these days in the new phase of the Tory party. However, she speaks honestly about a Tory view of the world. She wants pavements repaired, but she does not want to employ anyone to repair them. She wants a village hall, but she does not anyone to open it. She wants a town hall, but she does not want anyone employed in it.

The hon. Member for Billericay is at least more honest than the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine), who said that the local community does not want the cuts and that he has much sympathy with the people at the town hall who do not want their jobs to go. He said that it must be the nasty borough councillors who are squandering the extra £1·7 million, not on the jobs in the town hall, which he wishes to protect, nor on the services that the people want, but on mega, magic attendance allowances. We know that that is nonsense and the hon. Gentleman knows it, too.

Mr. Gould: He does not.

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps he does not know that it is nonsense, but he will get his come-uppance at the general election for not knowing what he is talking about and for trying to have it both ways.

Let us consider the honest, decent John Major face of Conservatism in the form of the hon. Members who represent Warwickshire. I have never seen a group whose members were so sycophantic towards each other. It is all wonderful stuff—no one wants to cut the police, everyone wants the motorways to be checked regularly and no one wants poll tax capping in Warwickshire. Even the hon. Member for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton) does not want poll tax capping in Streatham—he wants it down the road in Vauxhall or in Norwood. He does not want Streatham baths to be closed, and nor do we. We do not want anyone's baths to be closed. We want decent services provided by local people and funded by a decent balance between local and national expenditure.

Of course, we want people in Warwickshire to be proud of the education provided there. We want them to fight for

[Mr. Blunkett]

the services that they believe to be right for them. I commend the hon. Members for Warwick and Leamington and for Rugby and Kenilworth and all those who represent Warwickshire. They are right to support the belief in services to local people—whether it is the fire service which is under threat or decent provision in schools. All those things matter, and they matter in Langbaurgh, Bristol and Norwich. Only local people can determine what is right for them. The Government have no right to tell the people of Stoke-on-Trent that they must spend £2·2 million less than they intended to spend. It is not a profligate authority.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Ipswich who said that he did not want to rub shoulders with Lambeth, Somerset, Warwickshire or Langbaurgh. He did not want to rub shoulders with anyone if he could help it. We want to rub shoulders with people who believe in a sense of community, who want to restore a sense of service and who take the Prime Minster at face value. He and members of the Cabinet keep telling us that they now believe in public service, in quality and in public spending, but not in local authorities, and certainly not in the 14 capped authorities.

Much depends on whom one goes to. If one goes to the hard man, the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, would one believe that one would get a shift in one's budget? Four authorities went to him, made their case and pleaded their point. They included that bastion of revolutionary socialism, Lambeth. Four authorities went to the nice guy, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. Who got the uplift? The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who clearly did not have authority to do anything, told Stoke-on-Trent that it was wonderful and gave it nothing. He also gave nothing to the other three authorities that visited him. Mr. Hard Guy, whose reputation is in severe danger of crumbling at this last hurdle before the general election, allocated the four authorities that saw him an uplift. There is a lesson in that. If the other six had gone to the Secretary of State, they would have been given a budget increase, not a decrease.

We all know that the Secretary of State does not believe in capping, and nor did the previous Secretary of State or his predecessor even though he took a Billericay view of the world. Nobody, except one or two of the hon. Members who have spoken tonight, who have to say that they support capping to show that they still cling to the hard-line policy of the Minister of State, really believes in it. The fact that there have had to be adjustments shows that all the capping is, at the bottom line, nonsense.

The standard spending assessments on which the figures are predicated are nonsense. In the *Local Government Chronicle* survey last week, 83 per cent. of treasurers said clearly that they thought that the system was flawed. It does not stand up to scrutiny and it should not do. The SSAs were never intended to be used for determining the exact level of spending in any individual local authority. No Government can know what individual councils should spend. No Minister, no matter how wise, can know the circumstances on the ground. He cannot know about the gaps in the pavement in Billericay, about the temperature of the water in Streatham or whether the council is giving good or bad value for money in Bristol or in Kingswood. Only local people can make a judgment. A decent and fair local democratic system, with annual elections, as we have suggested, and with intervention on quality, not on reducing service, will achieve the results.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) suggested early in the debate that reducing people's services somehow increased value for money. It does not. What counts is intervention to improve management, to increase training and to ensure that services are delivered flexibly and sensitively for people who need them, not massive cuts in the budgets and the provision of services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood said, when voluntary sector groups find that their grants are cut and when people discover that their services have gone, they ask one simple question—"Why?"

It is clear tonight that the answer ranges over a number of pounds. In Warwickshire, the figure is £9. For a few pounds a year—not a week—does one get the service that one wants or the service that the Government will foist on people? At last, the Government have decided that they will overcome the pretence that there are good and bad authorities. From the beginning of June when we debate the Bill that the Government will introduce, every local authority is a bad authority. Every authority will have to be whipped into line. Every authority will have to be overseen by a central Government who cannot allow diversity and decentralisation, and who cannot let local democracy work. A dictatorship of parliamentary democracy is no democracy at all.

To add insult to injury, it is those authorities which have fallen into line—the Minister was right when he said this—in terms of getting below the cap which should also be considered tonight. Until the Minister for Public Transport with responsibility for roads and traffic wrote to me yesterday, the Government intended to continue to cap the south Yorkshire authorities for spending on supertram money that they were receiving from the Department of Transport. As daft and stupid a way of running a system I cannot imagine.

Every authority has been affected because they have all had to make cuts. My authority has had to cut 1,300 posts this year. It is a crime that the streets are dirty. It is a crime that education has been cut in the way that it has. It is disgraceful that we cannot care for the elderly. There is only one set of people to blame and it is those on the Conservative Benches tonight.

11.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): This has been an important and long debate. After some four hours, I shall do my best to answer the large number of points raised by right hon. and hon. Members. I am grateful to many of my hon. Friends for their contributions to this debate. Warwickshire has been represented in force by my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) who have spoken or intervened. In addition, my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) have been present in the Chamber for some hours.

We have also enjoyed interventions from my hon. Friends the Members for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) and for Billericay

(Mrs. Gorman), whose colourful performance enlivened the debate no end. She is absolutely right. I did indeed meet councillors and council officers from her borough on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton) made a powerful argument and my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), speaking in her traditional and forthright way, enlivened the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) brought a powerful argument to bear on the situation there. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who made an important contribution which was none the less for the staggering attacks made on him by an Opposition Member. My hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) and for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) also made important contributions. I shall attempt to deal with some of the points that they raised, but if time marches on too quickly I may not be able to answer all of them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay brought to my attention the fact that it was alleged that her council, Basildon, had not had the opportunity of making its voice heard. That is not so. I met a deputation from the council on 9 May and councillor Ballard is reported in the local newspaper as saying:

"It was a friendly, constructive and helpful discusssion. We put all our cards on the table and the minister listened sympathetically."

We have heard tonight that my hard and hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities has turned into the soft man and it is now the turn of the new hard man to wind up tonight's debate. I start by making it clear that the aim of capping is to require authorities to cut their budgets to a level which is not excessive. It is only when we have been convinced that we could not demand that of an authority that we have decided to require a somewhat smaller reduction. In the case of Stoke-on-Trent and Norwich we were satisfied that it was right to require the full reduction for 1991-92. For Ipswich and Basildon we decided that——

Ms. Walley *rose*——

Mr. Key: The hon. Lady must contain herself. I promise that I will answer the points concerning Stoke, but if she insists on intervening I shall be less likely to get there.

When we proposed our initial caps for Ipswich and Basildon we decided that in their circumstances some small reduction in 1991-92 was appropriate. We considered all the information submitted by the councils and we made our judgments. It is nonsense to suggest that the decisions are unfair or that the process is cloaked in secrecy. All the councils were given every opportunity to make their case for a higher cap. They took advantage of that opportunity. We listened carefully but concluded that our original judgments were, in most cases, right.

Let me start with the standard spending assessments. We have heard a lot this evening about how inadequate they are. I am at a loss to understand how hon. Members can make that accusation. SSAs are 19·4 per cent. up on last year. Hon. Members may say that that is hopelessly inadequate, but 237 local authorities throughout the country have budgeted within their SSAs. Across the country as a whole, the total of local authority budgets is just a half of 1 per cent. above total standard spending. Our approach has been that authorities budgeting a large amount over SSA must have smaller increases in their spending. The capping criteria reflect that. The eight authorities in this order are the only ones that failed to exercise the necessary restraint. It is gratifying that so many authorities have this year budgeted sensibly. We are pledged to encouraging them to do that in the future.

If the House approves the draft orders, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make them shortly thereafter and notices will be served on the local authorities concerned. We hope to do that very quickly. Authorities will then have 21 days to set their new, lower budgets. Charge payers should receive their lower bills next month.

Several Opposition Members have told chilling tales about the effects of capping on education, the social services and the police. I believe that many of these tales are mischievous. They have caused unnecessary anguish to parents and elderly people. The evidence is different. In many authorities capping is encouraging imaginative new ideas about how services are to be provided. Well-managed authorities are moving away from 100 per cent. local authority provision of, for example, residential care, or by stimulating co-operation with the private and voluntary sectors and by setting charges that reflect ability to pay. In education, 104 of the 109 education authorities are pursuing our education reforms without indulging in excessive budgets. Capping is providing a much-needed challenge to authorities that are notoriously inefficient. It is a tragedy that capping was needed to achieve that.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) referred to Stoke-on-Trent as the "sick" city. We are very much aware of Stoke-on-Trent's circumstances. We looked carefully at the council's health profile of the city of Stoke-on-Trent that it sent to us and that we discussed. Stoke-on-Trent receives very substantial Government assistance. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities referred to some of it. However, the council chose to increase its budget to 14 per cent. over SSA, which itself had increased by over 26 per cent.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) asked me to explain why Stoke-on-Trent could have spent more last year than it is allowed to spend this year. Let us be clear. Stoke-on-Trent's budget last year was 24 per cent. above its SSA. It was on warning that the Government considered that it was spending too much then. But what did Stoke-on-Trent do? It increased its budget by 16·4 per cent.—hardly the act of an authority that is trying its best to restrain spending. The cap specified in the draft order allows a 7·3 per cent. increase. We believe that this is reasonable and perfectly achievable for Stoke-on-Trent.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South said that last year the Minister had said that a £33·7 million budget was appropriate and proper. I fear that the right hon. Gentleman has misinterpreted what was said. Last year, as this year, the appropriate level of spending is the standard spending assessment. Last year, Stoke-on-Trent budgeted 24 per cent. above SSA. Such a spending level is far from appropriate; we have never said otherwise. I accept that we did not cap Stoke-on-Trent last year. That is because last year we had a per adult element in our criteria. Therefore, we capped only those authorities that were most substantially in excess of the SSA. This year, having announced our provisional criteria in advance, it

[Mr. Key]

was right for us to act wherever a budget was excessive, or represented an excessive increase. We have done that. That is why Stoke-on-Trent has been capped.

I do not say that Stoke should be compared only with the other district councils around. Warrington has many of the problems of Stoke. Stoke receives 13 per cent. more SSA per adult than Warrington. However, we could go on for a long time with such comparisons, and I must move on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington spoke at some length about SSAs. We are beginning to discuss with local authority associations the SSA methodology for next year. We shall, of course, consider carefully any fresh evidence about SSAs. We are more than happy to meet my hon. Friend and other Warwickshire Members to discuss the position of Warwickshire county council.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) also had a good deal to say about SSAs. He said that they were arbitrary and that decisions on distribution of revenue support grant were taken by unaccountable people in Whitehall. All the SSA calculations are discussed with local authority associations and proposals are put out to consultation every year. The final distribution report is debated in the House. Opposition Members can hardly claim that decisions are taken in secret.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North compared Norwich with the rest of Norfolk. I am grateful to him for comparing Labour Norwich and the surrounding Conservative districts. Labour Norwich set a budget £36 per adult above SSA. Breckland set a budget £24 below SSA. Broadland set a budget £29 below SSA. Kings Lynn and West Norfolk set a budget £35 below SSA. South Norfolk set a budget £25 below SSA.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North spoke eloquently about the heritage of Norwich. There are many similarities between his constituency and mine of Salisbury. They are both beautiful ancient cities. We accept that Norwich has greater needs. It is a regional centre and has more social disadvantage. Salisbury's SSA is £103 per adult. Norwich's SSA is £141 per adult—37 per cent. more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth spoke about police authorities. That is an important point. The Government are fully committed to effective policing. The number of police officers has risen by some 15,000 men and women since 1979. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a further increase of 700 posts last December. We provided £4·67 billion for police expenditure this year—11·8 per cent. more than in 1990-91. For every £20 that police authorities spend, central Government funding meets about £17. I should add that, in Warwickshire, the police SSA increased by 12·4 per cent. compared with the shire county average of 10·5 per cent. The police service SSA for all forces other than the Metropolitan force is based on police establishments approved by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked me three questions. On the question about Wandsworth, Wirral as a whole does not have the needs of, say, Liverpool, Manchester or Wandsworth. It is much closer in character to St. Helens or Sefton and has an SSA to match its characteristics. Wirral's SSA is up 19·2 per cent. over last year. That is a generous increase.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Birkenhead said that Wirral had been penalised because it had a low base from the previous Conservative administration. If we had made a special allowance for spending from balances, Wirral would have had the benefit of that additional spending not once but twice, because it would have been built into the budget for this year. We capped Wirral because it pushed up its demands on taxpayers by 20 per cent. compared with last year. That was too much.

Thirdly, the hon. Member for Birkenhead asked me about taking restraining measures against police and transport authorities, over which he said that Wirral had no control. The police and transport authorities are in a different position from that of the local authority. The police budget does not come within Wirral's budget. It has no bearing on whether Wirral is capped. But if a metropolitan police authority had budgeted excessively, we would have capped it. I accept that the transport authority's budget affects Wirral's budget. But Wirral is represented on that authority and it cannot claim that it has no say in the transport authority's budget.

Local authorities have to play their part in restraining public expenditure. If they do not, the Government cannot stand by. Inflation is now running at just about 6 per cent. Would Opposition Members stand idly by and let those authorities take ever more than their fair share of the nation's resources? We could not do so, and we have not done so.

I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 191.

Division No. 161] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Aitken, Jonathan	Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Alexander, Richard	Budgen, Nicholas
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Burns, Simon
Amess, David	Burt, Alistair
Amos, Alan	Butterfill, John
Arbuthnot, James	Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Carrington, Matthew
Ashby, David	Cash, William
Atkinson, David	Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Chapman, Sydney
Batiste, Spencer	Chope, Christopher
Bellingham, Henry	Churchill, Mr
Bendall, Vivian	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Benyon, W.	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Bitten, Rt Hon John	Colvin, Michael
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Conway, Derek
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Body, Sir Richard	Cope, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Cormack, Patrick
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Couchman, James
Boswell, Tim	Cran, James
Bottomley, Peter	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Day, Stephen
Bowis, John	Dickens, Geoffrey
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes	Dorrell, Stephen
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Brazier, Julian	Dover, Den
Bright, Graham	Dunn, Bob
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*	Durant, Sir Anthony

Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eggar, Tim
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William

McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Charge Limitation (England) (Maximum Amounts) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 16th May, be approved.

PETITIONS

Red Route Pilot Scheme (Islington)

11.43 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I have the honour to present on behalf of 788 of my constituents and others 15 petitions relating to the introduction by the Department of Transport of a pilot red route along the line of the A1 through my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

The first petition is a petition of the staff of Islington Green school, with 43 signatures on it, saying that they complain that the proposed pilot scheme for red routes in London will irretrievably damage the ancient shopping and business streets and communities through which the pilot route passes, and they note that it excites strong and widespread opposition. That indeed is the case.

There is a petition from the proprietor and shoppers of "At the Sign of the Chest of Drawers" in Upper street, London N1, signed by 18 people. That petition says that the pilot scheme for red routes introduced in January 1991 along Upper street, has damaged the trade and access to local shopping along the implemented section and is strongly opposed by the petitioners.

There is a petition with 11 signatures from the staff and clients of SSS Dry Cleaners of 264 Upper street London N1. They say that the red route pilot scheme involving parking and loading restrictions has had a detrimental effect on their right to trade and to accessible local services.

There is a petition with 252 signatures from the proprietor, staff and users of Canonbury Art and Picture Framers of 266 Upper street, London N1. They say that the red route pilot scheme as implemented on Upper street has proved detrimental to their trade, has limited access to local shopping and indeed threatens irreparable harm to the local business community. That is a sentiment that I entirely share and endorse.

There is a petition containing 42 signatures from the staff and customers of the Canonbury Book Shop of 271 Upper street, London N1. They say that the A1 red route implemented on our stretch of Upper Street . . . has made shopping increasingly difficult because of parking restrictions, has made business difficult because of loading restrictions and is therefore opposed by your petitioners.

There is a petition from the proprietor and customers of a secondhand furniture store at 209-11 Holloway road, London N7. It states that the pilot scheme has seriously affected the ability of the business to carry out trade, which necessitates loading and unloading heavy items of furniture. It says that it is difficult for the proprietor and difficult for customers, and is affecting the proprietor's livelihood, in common with many other traders along the red route.

There is a petition from the owner, staff and customers of Formsigns of 537 Holloway road, London N19. They say that their business has been seriously affected by the parking and loading restrictions that have been imposed as a result of the red route experiment, and that they have lost 30 to 40 per cent. of their business. Their customers go elsewhere because of the inconvenience in finding parking space and of having to carry heavy goods a long way. They claim that fellow traders are equally badly affected and

that shops and businesses are closing, with a downgrading effect on the whole neighbourhood, which has received no benefit from the scheme.

There is a petition containing 72 signatures from the proprietor, staff and customers of the Kebab House and Restaurant of 544 Holloway road. They say that the red route scheme means that their customers cannot stop and park. They say that they experience difficulty with their meat deliveries. They claim that this has meant a 50 per cent. cut in their take-away and restaurant trade. They believe that that is not good either for the local community.

There is a petition containing 35 signatures from the proprietor and customers of News and Food of 651 Holloway road, London N19. The petition states that the red route experiment along the Holloway road has had a serious effect on the business because people cannot stop to shop, and if they do they receive a ticket or can be towed away. It is claimed that the situation is especially serious for customers with disabilities who want to stop as near to the shop as is possible. It is said that shops will close because of the experiment.

There is a petition bearing four signatures from the London Trophy Company of 653 Holloway road, London N19. The petition states that the business is seriously affected by the experimental red route on the Holloway road. The business depends on ease of access to customers. As it is a specialist London-wide company, customers who have difficulty in stopping, parking or collecting their goods are unlikely to come to the shop again.

There is a petition containing 36 signatures from the proprietor, staff, customers and distributors of Moonlight Collection of 660A Holloway road, London N19. It says that the business is badly affected because of the loading difficulties that are associated with the experimental red route, such that they cannot go about their business easily, and nor can their customers or collectors for retail outlets.

There is a petition with 53 signatures from the buyers at Pure Groove Records of 679 Holloway road, London N19. It shows

that the Red Routes are preventing us from doing business in the store easily meaning that the place is losing money and could close down. This is a specialist place and must not be allowed to go.

There is a petition with 40 signatures from the proprietor of La Boulangerie at 746 Holloway road, London N19, and his staff and customers. It says that

the experimental traffic scheme, the Red Route, is damaging his business, affecting his customers so that they do not want to shop there, and damaging other traders next to him.

There is a petition with 55 signatures from the proprietor and customers of a florist's store at 748 Holloway road, London N19, which says that

the Red Route Pilot scheme is having a deleterious effect on our business. We rely on people being able to stop easily to buy flowers and they are now unable to do this. We are also concerned that people with disabilities are not allowed to stop to shop and have been ticketed and asked to move on—this is unacceptable. All local shopping is affected by this scheme and this has an adverse effect on the neighbourhood.

Finally, there is a petition with 69 signatures from the staff and customers of Crest Wines of 790 Holloway road, London N19. They say that

the Red Route Pilot scheme has damaged local trade to the extent that it may not recover, has made it very difficult for people with disabilities to shop locally, has made Holloway Road itself less safe for pedestrians because traffic speeds have increased and has proved to be of no benefit to the local community whatsoever whilst creating an urban highway dedicated to car commuters speeding through Archway on their way to the City or Docklands. The local community, especially the business community, will die.

That petition is not exaggerated. The feeling of local people, and especially of local traders, is accurately reflected in the petitions. There is an enormous depth of feeling about this issue locally and I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport will take some notice, for once, of the views of local people about this matter.

To lie upon the Table.

11.52 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I rise to present 19 petitions concerning the introduction of a red route pilot scheme along the Holloway road through my constituency, with 1,301 supporting signatures on them.

These petitions come from the owners and customers of a large number of small businesses along the route who are quite rightly concerned about the safety and the future of the community and the increasing volumes of traffic that they believe that the red route is likely to bring.

The first petition is

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of owner, staff and customers of Chris Stevens Ltd., Tile and Mosaic Supplies, 561 Holloway Road, London N19.

Sheweth that the Red Route scheme as implemented on the Holloway Road has made it difficult to carry out our trade, our suppliers find it difficult to make deliveries and our clients are hampered in collecting their goods. Our trade relies on people being able to park and load easily . . .

We are an important local trader with spin off for other trades e.g. newsagents and cafes—the red route is affecting all local trade and may mean closures in some cases. This has a serious effect on local businesses and the local community. We are also seriously concerned about pedestrians using the zebra crossing near us, women, children and older people are particularly at risk from the traffic speeds and the inability of some traffic to pull up easily.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Transport to abandon the A1 Red Route pilot scheme now and protect our local shopping. And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

This petition is supported by 436 signatures.

The next petition is from the staff and customers of the pet shop at 620 Holloway road. It says that they have had a 20 to 30 per cent. loss of trade. The route is damaging to local shopping and has made Holloway road less safe for pedestrians because of increased traffic speeds. The scheme is therefore damaging the whole community. It, too, asks for the abandonment of the scheme.

The next is from the residents of Ferntower road, which is some way from the Holloway road but people from there use the area for their shopping. The petition shows that

the proposed pilot scheme of red routes in London will irretrievably damage the ancient shopping and business streets and communities through which the pilot route passes and excites strong and widespread opposition.

The petition asks for the scheme to be abandoned, and seeks increased investment in public transport.

The next petition is from the owner and customers of the Aviation book shop at 656 Holloway road, where business is badly affected by

restrictions imposed by the red route.

As a specialist shop, it finds it difficult because of people's inability to make deliveries and of customers' inability to get to the shop.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

There is also a petition from Archway News, of 693 Holloway road, showing that the red route pilot scheme is a

blight on the community . . . is affecting our local businesses. People can no longer stop to shop. People crossing the road are in ever increasing danger from faster traffic, and supplies cannot be delivered. Residents cannot park because cars use up the space and shops are beginning to lose out.

Again, the petitioners ask that the scheme be abandoned and that local shopping facilities be protected. I can well understand their feelings, as I use that shop myself.

The customers of Andrewes cafe at 782 Holloway road say that

the red routes are bad for local business and for the community, and particularly for those with disabilities who want to stop and go into shops

and find their vehicles ticketed as a result.

Customers of the cafe at 628 Holloway road say:

the operation of the red routes is affecting local shopping badly. Shopkeepers find it difficult to maintain their businesses because loading is difficult and because people can no longer stop to shop. Local residents cannot park near our homes because the space is taken up by large numbers of cars, and crossing Holloway road has become dangerous and difficult.

I have another petition, from the customers of the New York Pizza at 624 Holloway road. It makes similar points about the difficulties of receiving deliveries. It is also difficult for people to come into this shop. The petition also asks for the scheme to be abandoned.

Staff and customers of the Delight supermarket on Holloway road have also presented a petition. I know it well; it is an important local facility:

Parking, and particularly the loading restrictions outside the store, are having a damaging effect on our trade because of the difficulty of having goods delivered to the shop for sale.

There is a petition from the staff and customers of Sam's News, of 638 Holloway road, showing that

the red route experiment on the Holloway road has cut our trade in half and is having an equally serious effect on other local shops which the local community rely on. A lot of our customers want to maintain local shopping. Holloway road is in danger of becoming an urban highway, with no shops.

I fully understand and agree with that sentiment.

I have here a petition from the staff and customers of Lazio's jewellers, of 677 Holloway road, stating that

the experimental red route scheme in operation on the Holloway road prevents people from stopping and receiving deliveries to the shops.

There is a petition from the customers and users of Motorman, of 621 Holloway road, showing that the red route pilot scheme is

an unmitigated disaster for shoppers and traders alike.

A petition from the staff and students of the polytechnic of north London, which has buildings on both sides of the Holloway road and in other parts of north London, says that the pilot scheme for red routes in London will

irretrievably damage ancient shopping and business streets and communities through which the pilot route passes and excites widespread opposition.

A petition from a company called Chris Fitzgerald, of 670 to 672 Holloway road, shows that lack of shopping facilities in the district is damaging to it. The petition is supported and signed by 18 people who would like the scheme to be abandoned.

A petition from the staff and customers of Car Parts, at 552 Holloway road, states:

the red route scheme has damaged our trade, made it difficult for our clients to use the shop and is damaging the trade of other local shops.

It has 72 signatures.

There is a petition from the shoppers of a television repairs and electrical goods shop at 548 Holloway road. It is a typical local shop that performs a valuable service. The petition states that the red route scheme introduced in Holloway road in January 1991 has meant that the shop has lost customers. It states that there has been a

20 per cent. loss in takings, it is very difficult for our customers who are bringing larger goods to the shop because they can't stop outside, it also makes it difficult for us to get our deliveries, and our neighbouring traders are also affected; thus there is a serious effect on local shopping for customers and traders alike.

That petition has 54 signatures.

There is a petition from the owners and customers of Dan's cafe, at 673 Holloway road, showing that the red route scheme has had a serious effect on the trade of the cafe. That has 51 customers' signatures.

There is a petition from the owners of the franchise of the Perfect Pizza restaurant at 663 Holloway road showing that

the red route experimental scheme has had a disastrous effect on take-away trade and deliveries by car, and that bikes cannot stop at the premises, which means that people look elsewhere.

There is a petition from the customers and staff of the Chip Inn fish bar, of 193 Holloway road, showing that the scheme has

seriously affected our business which relied on passing and stopping trade and has also made it dangerous for children crossing the Holloway Road because of speeding traffic.

That petition has 72 signatures.

I am pleased to be able to present those petitions and well understand the sentiment behind them. Like those people who have signed the petitions, I live in the district and am devastated to see shop after shop go out of business. As they do so, the community along the Holloway road is gradually being killed off. We want public transport, not cars speeding through our community. That is the nub of the argument behind the petitions. I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport will end the ridiculous experiment as soon as possible so that the local community can get on with its life. The Department of Transport should put time, energy and resources into improving public transport so that we can use it rather than having subsidised company cars speeding through our community.

To lie upon the Table.

Planning Decisions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

12.2 am

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Before starting the Adjournment debate, I should be grateful if, as chairman of the all-party Indo-British parliamentary group, I could put on record the heartfelt sympathy of British parliamentarians for the people of India in the grievous blow that they have suffered tonight with the brutal assassination of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discusss the role of public opinion in planning decisions, whether taken by local councils or Ministers. Planning applications to construct large, new buildings almost always give rise to strong feelings, whether for or against. Often, there is much at stake, such as a conflict of interest between the prosperity of one group of people that clashes with the view or quality of life of others.

Parliament has enacted rules and procedures to try to ensure that decisions are fair. Public inquiries are set up to be something like law courts with lawyers. But there is a difference. Law courts are not democratically accountable to the public for their decisions, but local councils or the Government, in the value-judgments that they make when taking planning decisions, are. The public, who are increasingly consulted, expect planning authorities not only to take local opinion into account, but to act on it, especially if that local public opinion happens to lean heavily in one direction and if the planning arguments for and against an application are more or less equally balanced.

To establish some general principles relative to the role of public opinion in planning decisions, I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment some questions. First, can he give clear confirmation that, in his view, public opinion ought to have a role in planning decisions; that it in fact has a role; and that this will remain Government policy? Secondly, may I draw his attention to a document published by his Department PPG1, dated January 1988 and entitled "Planning Policy Guidance: General Policy and Principles"? Under the heading

"The purpose of the planning system",

paragraph 18 contains the following passage:

"Any relevant views expressed by third parties, by local residents and other neighbouring occupiers of land should be taken into account in determining planning applications . . . While the substance of local opposition must be considered, the duty is to decide each case on its planning merits . . . on its own, local opposition to a proposal is not a ground for the refusal of planning permission unless that opposition is founded upon valid planning reasons which are supported by substantial evidence."

Can my hon. Friend say whether the converse is true —whether, if local opposition is founded on valid planning reasons which are supported by substantial evidence, local opposition is a ground for the refusal of planning permission?

Thirdly—given the growing tendency for local councils all over the country to consult local residents for their opinions, whether in writing or through their speaking before planning committees or sub-committees—can my hon. Friend confirm that that trend is welcome to the Government? Fourthly, if local consultation is seen as desirable, does it not follow that weight should be given by planning authorities to the opinions of the public? In other words, there is no point in consulting unless one intends to give weight to the views derived from that consultation.

Fifthly, if when it is considering a planning application it is desirable and proper for a local planning authority to consult local public opinion and then give weight to it, is it not equally proper and desirable for the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Ministers in his Department who advise him, when acting as a planning authority on appeal or following a call-in, to give just the same weight to public opinion as they would expect a local council to do? Sixthly, if so, when the Secretary of State is deciding on a planning application, or on an appeal, should not this concept of consultation include evidence given by local people to the public inquiry? Otherwise, the inquiry inspector has no direct means of consulting the public.

Seventhly, can my hon. Friend confirm that, as stated in my debate on the application for a heliport in central London a year ago, the proportion of those cases where on appeal the Secretary of State decides differently from the recommendation of the planning inquiry inspector is still about 10 per cent.?

I wish to illustrate these general points on the role of public opinion in planning decisions with reference to one particular planning application by Marks and Spencer to construct large buildings in a conservation area close by a beautiful stretch of the River Thames at Twickenham. As the decision of the Secretary of State for the Environment is pending—which puts all Ministers in the Department of the Environment in a quasi-judicial position—my constituents will understand that I cannot ask my hon. Friend at this stage to say anything whatever about the merits of the case for or against. I can only ask him to take note of my views. I should add that I am not introducing any new material that was not available to the inquiry, at which I gave evidence.

The Department of the Environment is aware of the great concern of my constituents, since on 22 October I asked to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who was then the Secretary of State for the Environment, to request him to set up a public inquiry so that my constituents could make their views heard—whether for or against—after which the inspector would make a recommendation to the Secretary of State. Richmond upon Thames borough council, which had reached some agreement with Marks and Spencer, had obviously made up its mind, come what may, to grant planning permission to Marks and Spencer, despite growing local opposition to the scheme. I should say that that opposition related to the site. People liked the idea of a Marks and Spencer shop somewhere in Twickenham, but many people thought that it would be on the wrong site if it were beside the historic conservation area close by the River Thames.

In asking the Secretary of State to call in the planning decision—so that after the planning inquiry he, not the borough council, would have to decide—I argued that the application was not only of local concern but of wider regional interest. I quoted to him the Greater London development plan of some 20 years ago, which said:

"The Thames constitutes perhaps the greatest of all London's areas of special character. Its condition and future are matters of strategic concern to the whole of London".

I showed the Secretary of State the map, illustrating the fact that, within Greater London, along the Thames there

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

are three stretches of exceptional interest or beauty—at Greenwich, in central London and from Kew to Hampton Court. The site in question at Twickenham is near the centre of that stretch.

I turn now to the public inquiry, which took place between 5 and 11 February. There were eight witnesses in favour of the application, of whom six were consultants paid by Marks and Spencer for the purpose of giving technical evidence in support of the application; the seventh was a representative of the chamber of commerce and the eighth was the borough planning officer of Richmond upon Thames borough council, which was committed to support the scheme.

More than 40 witnesses gave notice to the inspector conducting the inquiry that they intended to give evidence against the scheme. They were discouraged by the inspector from overlapping or repetition, but more than 30 witnesses gave evidence. They included representatives of most of the main local amenity societies in Twickenham —for example, Mr. Beccles-Wilson, who is chairman of Strawberry Hill residents association and chairman of the Twickenham Town Committee; Mr. Plummer, chairman of the Twickenham Society; Dr. Payan, who is chairman of the York House Society; Mr. Greenwood, who is chairman of Richmond upon Thames Arts Council; Miss Schooling, who is secretary of the Twickenham Town Committee and founder of Friends of Radnor Gardens; Mr. Parton, representing the River Thames Society, which goes beyond my constituency; Dr. Helen Baker, who is chairman of the Pre-school Playgroups Association, which has a playgroup on the site; and Mrs. Pamela Moore of the East Twickenham and Riverside residents association.

The opposition stretched across all political parties. On the Conservative side, I gave evidence, as did the former mayor, Mrs. Ford Miller. Three representatives of the Twickenham Labour party gave evidence, including my prospective opponent in the general election. On the Liberal side, Mr. Bamber Gascoigne, the well-known broadcaster who lives locally, gave evidence. In addition, some eminent local individual residents gave evidence, including Professor Sir John Hale, the former chairman of the trustees of the National Gallery and also professor of Italian history at London university. Evidence was also given against the scheme by Mr. Richard Rogers, who is one of the greatest architects in the world. A considerable number of individual constituents also gave evidence against the scheme. There can therefore be no doubt about the range of local opinion against the scheme.

As the merits of the scheme will, I am sure, have been assessed impartially by the inspector, who impressed everyone by the way in which he handled the inquiry, it would be best if I continued on the theme of the strength of local opinion. A majority of local public opinion in Twickenham is now against the application. Originally, that was not the case. The borough council carried out a planning exercise in the consultation of February and March 1990. At that stage, there was a slight majority in favour of the scheme, but opinion locally has changed during 1990 and I believe that that has continued in the early part of 1991.

The change can be assessed from six different measures. Taken separately, perhaps, each falls short of being conclusive, but taken together they amount, as far as I can judge, to a clear sign that opinion is against the application. By 22 September—the evening when the council intended to decide for the scheme—the borough council had received 157 objections and 14 letters in favour —a ratio of 11 to one against. On 18 September I had chaired a public meeting that I had called and, after a full discussion, 154 people voted against the application and 11 were in favour of it.

By 22 October the Secretary of State for the Environment had received 120 letters asking him to call in the application, and only three asking him not to call it in. Of the latter, one was from Marks and Spencer, one was from Richmond council and there was one other. As the call-in would provide the only chance for a refusal of the application—whereas a decision not to call in would, because of the council planning committee's contingent decision on 22 September, result automatically in planning permission—it can be assumed that the 120 were not in favour of the application, while the three who wrote in against the call-in would have been in favour of it.

A form of survey conducted by two local newspapers resulted in a vote of 91 in favour of the scheme and 120 against. Letters to the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* totalled 35 against the scheme and seven for it. At the inquiry, about 40 witnesses were against the scheme and eight, to whom I referred earlier, were in favour.

I am therefore satisfied that there is overwhelming public opposition to this scheme. I hope that the Department of the Environment will decide against the scheme and that it will give such a decision as soon as possible in order not to prolong the uncertainty.

12.19 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) on obtaining this opportunity for raising an important issue which is a source of concern to many people. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, I cannot comment on the merits of the proposal to develop the Twickenham swimming baths site as it is currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for decision. However, I want to deal with the general issues that my hon. Friend raised about public participation in the development control process and I will try to answer as many of his specific questions as possible. I pay tribute to the vigour with which my hon. Friend champions his constituents' interests. I have no doubt that he always takes full account of the strength of local opinion in his constituency.

The issue of public participation in the planning process was debated on 16 April during the Committee stage of the Planning and Compensation Bill. During that debate I said:

"There is a need to ensure continuing public confidence in the development control process so that individual decisions are taken in the full knowledge of local opinion even if, as occasionally happens, those decisions do not reflect the wishes of the majority of local people."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 16 April 1991; c. 146.]

We all want planning decisions to be well informed and fair. To achieve that, it is essential for the process to be seen to be fair. That means, first, seeking to ensure that people who are likely to be affected by a development proposal are made aware of what is proposed. Secondly, it means giving them a chance to submit their views. Thirdly,

as my hon. Friend has said, it means giving due consideration to those views in the decision-making process.

A local planning authority, in considering a planning application—or the Secretary of State in considering a called-in planning application or appeal—is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material to the application, and to other material considerations. The Government have made it clear that an up-to-date local plan will carry considerable weight in reaching such development control decisions. We believe that the preparation of development plans—unitary development plans are currently being prepared in London—provides the opportunity for the expression of local choice in planning matters. When preparing its unitary development plan, the planning authority is required to give publicity to its draft proposals and to provide an opportunity for the public, whether as individuals or interested organisations, to express their views on them. In this context I note that the London borough council of Richmond has just published, on 13 May, its draft unitary development plan for consultation, and that neighbouring Kingston has recently completed the consultation stage on its plan.

The Government's long-held view has been that it was unnecessary to require publicity for every planning application in England and Wales. We took the view that any such statutory obligation would be bureaucratic, would place an unnacceptably large burden on the resources of local planning authorities, and would conflict with our policy of streamlining the planning system.

Recently, however, research has indicated that about 75 per cent. of local planning authorities in England and Wales undertake some form of neighbour notification, on the commendable ground that people should be made aware of what is happening in their areas. Furthermore, there is evidence that local authority involvement in the process of publicising planning applications need not be burdensome, with the increasing use of computers in local authorities' planning departments.

Accordingly, I announced to the House on 10 May that the Government had accepted the principle of publicity for all planning applications. My Department and the Welsh Office will consult publicly about what method or methods to adopt. We will issue a consultation paper by the end of June. I have already invited comments from the Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office about their experience in this area. In pursuing this path, we must be mindful that the requirement, which will be introduced in the general development order, will need to apply to development proposals for garden sheds as well as for town centre redevelopments. We will seek views on the merits of making developers responsible for publicising their proposals, or for putting the onus on planning authorities. We will invite comments on the pros and cons of newspaper advertisements, site notices and individual notification of neighbours.

Whichever options we go for, I am sure that public confidence and respect for the planning process will be enhanced, and that there will be far less cause for people to complain that development proposals have been approved by their local council without local residents having had the chance to make their views known.

My hon. Friend is interested in the question of the rights of third parties at public local inquiries. Under rule 11(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1988, third parties are able to make their views known at public local inquiries at the inspector's discretion. In practice, inspectors will listen to anyone who has something relevant to say, but we accept that the position may not be entirely clear from a reading of the inquiry rules. Consequently, a consultation paper, "The Review of the Town and Country Planning Inquiries Procedure Rules", issued by my Department on 26 March, contained the proposal that rule 11(2) should be recast to ensure that an inspector shall not unreasonably withhold permission for third parties to appear at a local inquiry.

That brings me to the points raised by my hon. Friend about the extent to which third party representations should be taken into account by local planning authorities and the Secretary of State when reaching decisions on planning applications. As my hon. Friend inquired on that point, I should say that the same weight must be placed whether the decision is being reached by the local planning authority or by the Secretary of State when the decision is being made.

The Government's guidance on this is set out in paragraph 18 of planning policy guidance note 1. That makes it clear that any relevant views expressed by third parties, by local residents and other neighbouring occupiers of land should be taken into account in determining planning applications. However, it goes on to state that, on its own, local opposition to a proposal is not a ground for the refusal of planning permission unless that opposition is founded upon valid planning reasons which are supported by substantial evidence, and that while the substance of local opposition must be considered, the duty is to decide each case on its planning merits.

Therefore, I hope that the message is clear. The views of local residents and other third parties should be taken into account as material considerations in the consideration of a planning application, provided those views are relevant to land-use planning matters. However, I must emphasise that, while relevant representations from third parties must be considered, they may be only one of many factors which decision makers in the planning process need to take into account.

Mr. Jessel: If consultation with the public has taken place, assuming that my hon. Friend accepts that the result of that consultation should carry some weight, does he accept that if public opinion is largely united and leans heavily in one direction it should carry more weight than if it is divided? Does he further accept that if the planning arguments are more or less equally balanced on a particular application, then public opinion, particularly if it leans heavily in one direction, would usually become more of a factor?

Mr. Yeo: I am not sure. My hon. Friend is tempting me in directions along which I am not sure how far I can travel. It is clear that, if public opinion is soundly based on planning merits, the fact that it was substantially in one direction or another would clearly weigh more heavily in the mind of either the local planning authority or my right hon. Friend than if that public opinion was roughly divided in both directions. Provided that it is based on sound planning arguments, public opinion can give a clear signal.

The planning system is designed to reconcile conflicts between the need for development, which is necessary for the provision of jobs and the growth of the national

[Mr. Yeo]

economy, with the need to protect the environment and local amenity. That process comes together in the form of the elected local planning authority or, in some cases, the Government in the form of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I know that my hon. Friend is also interested in the arrangements for notifying planning inspectors of relevant court judgments. In general, the Department's planning inspectorate ensures that inspectors are made aware of all judgments which have implications for the cases with which they are or are likely to be concerned.

On my hon. Friend's particular concern with the Twickenham inquiry, I can tell him that the inspector's report has not yet been received by the Department but that we expect to receive it shortly. I cannot say precisely when decisions will be issued on the case. The Department's aim is to reach decisions on called-in cases within 13 weeks of receipt of the inspector's report. However, because call-in cases are often, by their nature, the most controversial and complex of all planning cases, decisions can sometimes take longer to reach.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend be kind enough to check that? He said just now that the Department had not received a report, but I was told by the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State, whom I asked about this during the second week in April, that it was due to reach the Department's regional office that week. Could there be some distinction between the regional office and the headquarters?

Mr. Yeo: There may be some distinction, but as the time for this Adjournment debate is running out I may have to write to my hon. Friend to clarify that point. However, I can assure him that the Department tries to reach decisions as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, the complexity of some cases means that we do not always achieve our target of dealing with cases that have been called in within 13 weeks of receipt of the inspector's report.

My hon. Friend raised a point, which he also raised in an Adjournment debate at about this time last year, about the number of decisions that the Secretary of State takes that involve overturning the inspector's recommendations. In the year 1989-90, the Secretary of State issued 299 decisions following planning inquiries. Of these, 21—or just 7 per cent.—were contrary to the inspector's recommendations. That is marginally lower than the figures and the percentage given to my hon. Friend in his Adjournment debate last year. The number of decisions taken by the Secretary of State that are contrary to the inspector's recommendations represents under 0·1 per cent. of all the 26,500 appeal decisions issued during the year I mentioned.

I hope that what I have said in this brief debate has reassured my hon. Friend that, as far as practicable, given the statutory duties placed on local planning authorities and on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the planning system takes full account of the need to involve local residents and communities in the decision-making process.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 6 June.

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 6 June.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 May], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate further adjourned till Thursday 6 June.

Mr. Speaker: As the next three Bills have blocking motions, I shall put them together.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 6 June.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (HARBOURS) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words about the death of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. It would be wrong to begin Foreign and Commonwealth questions without doing so. I know that the House will join me in condemning the assassination. It is a fearful tragedy. No one who knew Rajiv Gandhi could doubt that it was devotion to India that brought him into political life in the first place and led him to the top. The loss for India and for his friends is beyond calculation, and I am sure that the House will wish to join us in sending our deep sympathy to his family and to the people of India. We are confident that India, as a great democracy, will surmount even this disaster.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): With permission, Mr. Speaker, may I say first how absolutely right the Foreign Secretary was to start our proceedings this afternoon as he did. We echo entirely what he said, and he spoke for the whole House. We—my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I—have had our own acquaintance with Rajiv as well as with his mother. I last saw Rajiv at the Namibian independence celebrations in Windhoek last year, when the Foreign Secretary was there.

We have a particular and long-standing relationship with the Indian people, which stems from the independence of India, which was brought about under one of our Governments. Since that time, both sides of the House have admired the strength of Indian democracy and have admired that family for its contribution to Indian democracy. It is tragic that such an event should have taken place during an election, one in which Rajiv might again have become the Prime Minister of his country.

The Foreign Secretary is right to say that Indian democracy is strong enough to withstand even this event. It is a great democracy which we admire enormously and which will persevere and survive. In sending our sympathy to Rajiv's family and to the Indian people, let us not forget the Indian community in this country who will share the grief of their compatriots in India. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to associate all the Liberal Democrats with everything that the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said. The sheer wickedness of putting a bomb in a basket of flowers to kill a democratic politician leaves one emotionally empty. The hugely important thing that Rajiv Gandhi sought to do was to bring to India reconciliation between different groups and different religions. That aim will continue after his death and we salute him for that high objective. We grieve with his wife, his family and his people. This is a terribly sad moment.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the whole House will wish to be associated with what the Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Economic Unity

1. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on further progress in the intergovernmental conference in the European Community on economic unity.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The United Kingdom continues to play a positive part in the European monetary union intergovernmental conference. The most recent discussions were in ECOFIN—the Economic and Finance Council—on 11 May 1991, attended by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mrs. Currie: Bearing in mind the huge changes that the negotiations and discussions would mean for the United Kingdom and the fact that, according to opinion polls, two thirds of the British people think that we will be at stage 3 with a single currency by the year 2000 and more than half of them think that that is a good thing, does my right hon. Friend accept that the correct role of United Kingdom Ministers is to defend United Kingdom interests in all the negotiations, but as a part of, and at the heart of, a Europe that continues to be strong, democratic and free?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The negotiations at both conferences—the one in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes part and the one in which I take part—have their occasional difficulties, as my hon. Friend knows, but they are being held in a good atmosphere and if everyone acts in the spirit that my hon. Friend suggested, the prospects will be good.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Foreign Secretary think that the good atmosphere to which he referred has been improved by the early-day motion on the Order Paper?

Mr. Hurd: I thought that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt very adeptly with that matter yesterday. I have nothing to add to the comments that he made.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is great confidence among Conservative Members in his ability to stand up for British interests in the negotiations and that there is no general willingness to tie his hands by imposing conditions on which concessions he may wish to offer to secure still more vital British objectives?

Mr. Hurd: The stance that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I are taking in the two sets of discussions has been fully discussed in the House and in the country. I hope that, as my hon. Friend says, it commands general consent.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman must not be quite so coy about the early-day motion and he must come clean on where he stands on it. Is the Government's policy the one that we know that the right hon. Gentleman favours, signing up for EMU and the single currency; or is it the policy of Sir Leon Brittan, which would side-track us on a double-track approach; or is it the policy of the early-day motion, which everyone knows that Downing street has stirred up and is the Prime Minister's position? Which of the three policies—*[Interruption.]* It is the tendency of Conservative Members to heckle on all their splits so they now heckle a lot. Which of the three is the Government's policy, or are they dithering among the three?

Mr. Hurd: In following the right hon. Gentleman over many years, I have noticed that when he says that a certain thing is something that everybody knows, it is usually open to question, and that is exactly the position with his remarks today. The early-day motion to which he has again drawn attention refers to a text which the Luxembourg presidency put forward in an attempt to reach a compromise. There are various points in the text and some, although not all, are set out in the early-day motion and will need substantial change if they are to have our support.

Caribbean (Drugs Trade)

2. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international measures are being taken to tackle the drugs trade in the Caribbean.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): The drugs trade poses a serious threat to the Caribbean. We are actively helping regional and international efforts aimed at interdicting drug smuggling, pursuing drug traffickers and confiscating their assets.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government pay great attention, applying considerable detail, to drug trafficking in the dependent territories and that they are taking a series of measures in co-operation with independent countries in the Caribbean which is to be welcomed?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. Much of the United Kingdom's drug-related assistance goes to the region, especially to the dependent territories. That assistance amounted to more than £4 million last year. We are in contact with the independent countries and encourage them to enact suitable legislation and sign agreements with us. Recently, I signed an agreement with Barbados on confiscation of drug-related assets.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Although I welcome the position on the Caribbean, the Minister will be aware that some people there forecast that the movement will spread to Europe. Is he satisfied that drug smuggling into Europe will be met with the same international co-operation to destroy trafficking and protect our people?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, it is particularly because of the movement of drugs from the Caribbean to Europe that we take such an interest. Naturally, we are also concerned for the interests of that region, but there is a community of interest between us because the drugs ultimately come here.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: When considering international measures, will my hon. Friend bear in mind the potential of the banking operations on many of the Caribbean islands to launder money on behalf of the drugs trade?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, we are conscious of the need for arrangements to counter money laundering. Part of our activities is to advise on how to counter money laundering in that region.

European Council

3. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is on the agenda of the European Council of 28 and 29 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I expect discussion to cover the two intergovernmental conferences, progress in the single market programme and major international issues. The Luxembourg presidency has not yet announced the formal agenda.

Mr. Buckley: Will the Heads of Government discuss why the United Kingdom is the only country in the European Community ever to have the Commissioner block regional development grant due to the misappropriation—if that is the proper word—of the Treasury in terms of the European Parliament? Will the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary raise the matter of fines that the United Kingdom Government wish to impose on European Governments for not carrying out Community law for the Treasury in that matter?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure that I follow the hon. Gentleman's question. If he wishes to write to me, the Treasury or the Department of Trade and Industry about his complaint, I shall look into it.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, one of our proposals to the intergovernmental conference is that countries that persistently refuse to carry out their obligations within the Community should suffer in the form of fines.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. Friend accept that a statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday, on the early-day motion that has been mentioned today, has gone down extremely well with a very high proportion of Conservative Members? I take this opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers on their efforts to ensure that the British line stands firm on those vital matters. I totally repudiate the remarks by the shadow Foreign Secretary suggesting that the motion was inspired at No. 10 Downing street. It came from the Conservative Back Benches.

Mr. Hurd: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is delighted. I gracefully accept his congratulations.

Mr. Radice: Were the right hon. Gentleman a Back Bencher, would he have signed that early-day motion?

Mr. Hurd: I would have had a long talk with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) first.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the role of political leadership to explain to the country and to the House the issues of principle and detail? Is not there a grave danger that the House and the country will be left without leadership on the vital issue of economic and monetary union?

Mr. Hurd: I know of few political subjects that have been so thoroughly discussed and debated in the past months as that one was. Of course, my hon. Friend is right—there will need to be a constant process of debate and coming and going. As I understand it, the House will have an opportunity between now and the summit to go over those issues again.

Single Market

4. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the most recent meeting with other Foreign Ministers from other EC member states on progress towards establishment of the single market.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Single market questions were not discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 13 and 14 May. Single market business is normally conducted at the Internal Market Council, where Department of Trade and Industry Ministers represent the United Kingdom. The Internal Market Council next meets on 18 June.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister insist that the United Kingdom has the right to ban the importation of dangerous dogs, illegal drugs and illegal arms at the frontiers of this country, irrespective of the single market? If those overpaid, arrogant, appointed Commissioners try to interfere, will he muzzle them or will he be the lapdog of the Common Market, as the Government have been for the past 12 years when they have capitulated to every demand made by the Common Market?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman was once an overpaid Member of the European Parliament and I dare say that, given the marginality of his seat, he may soon be looking for another European seat.

The United Kingdom does not share the Commission's views on the abolition of border controls. Frontier checks will continue to be necessary to prevent illegal immigration, terrorism, drug trafficking and serious crimes, as well as the other matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the intergovernmental conference which is under way is about something completely different from the single market? The draft treaty from the Luxembourg presidency is about who controls economic, foreign and immigration policies and much else. Does it strike my hon. Friend as extraordinary that the newly pin-striped socialist nellies have no policy on that whatsoever?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend is right to say that intergovernmental conferences range over wide issues. They discuss the future of the European Community and European union and, as my hon. Friend said, the Government are at the centre of that debate. We intend to ensure that the next steps that the Community and the European union take will have the fingerprints of Britain all over them and that our influence is well brought to bear. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the

Labour party has spent a generation campaigning for withdrawal from the Community and now does not exactly know which way to move. One part of the party is manned by Europhobes, another part by Europhiles and it is led by Europhoneys.

Mr. Robertson: Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There seems to be a bit of a holiday atmosphere—will hon. Members please settle down.

Mr. Robertson: I was tempted to ask whether, if the Minister had still been the deputy Chief Whip, there would have been any early-day motion for us to discuss. Instead, I shall point out the dramatic contrast between the words of the Secretary of State for Employment which appeared in the *Financial Times* last Monday, which suggested that the British Government's stance on the social charter had softened, and the hard-line approach taken on the same day in the Foreign Affairs Council by the Foreign Secretary, who said that the British Government opposed the social charter. If majority voting on social affairs is proposed, will the British Government use their veto at the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am able to give a simple answer on both the hon. Gentleman's points. I shall deal first with the social action programme within the Community and the general action taken by the Community on social issues. The hon. Gentleman will know—I wish that he would also make it known to his hon. Friends—that the United Kingdom is the only member state so far to have implemented all 18 of the directives due for implementation. We have an excellent record on social issues, for which I make no apologies.

Secondly, the Government and their predecessors during the past 12 or 14 years have invested a considerable amount of effort, with the support of the British people, in shaping the way in which we think that industrial relations should be conducted in this country. The result of that policy during the past decade has meant that we now enjoy the best industrial relations that we have enjoyed for many years, which has enabled our nation's economy to prosper in a way that it has not done before. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government do not intend those achievements to be reversed by an extension of qualified majority voting within the Community.

Mr. Marlow: Whatever the merits of the issue, did we give the European institutions, within the single market, the right to decide about tobacco advertising? I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it is one thing for the House to surrender powers to the European Community but that those powers should not be acquired by stealth.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that Britain's support for the single market and Britain's decision to achieve it by qualified majority voting was a wise decision and that the implementation of the single market is the driving force behind the Community. As regards the proposed directive on tobacco advertising, it is only a proposal. It raises a substantial number of difficulties, not merely for Britain but for many other member states.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the inadequate answer from the Minister, who is a servile Euro-fanatic, I ask leave to raise this matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me clear up this matter. It is certainly legitimate to ask to raise matters on the Adjournment, but not by making a speech and giving a foretaste of what the hon. Gentleman may say if he gets that Adjournment debate.

Sri Lanka

5. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the Sri Lankan Government in their efforts to overcome the terrorist challenge that they face, but at the same time we have made very clear our concerns that all parties must fully respect human rights.

Mr. Battle: In pressing the Sri Lankan Government to pursue a political solution to the conflict between the Sinhala and the Tamils, can the Minister assure me that our Government will support the Australian initiative for mediation by the Commonwealth?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have always made it clear that if there is any helpful part that we can play through mediation at the request of the Sri Lankan Government, we shall do so.

Mr. Michael Morris: Has my hon. Friend seen the same reports that I have received on the local elections in Sri Lanka, saying that they were free and fair and that Tamils stood and were elected? Is it significant now that, in response to the tragedy in India, the voice of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was heard from that organisation's European headquarters in London? Is not it time that the Foreign Office and the Home Office got together to deal with those people who are essentially here on bogus visas?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I can confirm that it is our judgment that the elections were free and fair. Indeed, the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), to whom I have spoken, were observers at those elections, and I am happy to say that they endorse that judgment, as does the high commissioner in Sri Lanka.

On the other matter that my hon. Friend mentioned, of course, should any evidence of illegal activity be noted or observed by anyone in London, that would be a matter for the police. At present, the LTTE's office in London is entitled to stay here. If anyone can provide any evidence that should be drawn to the attention of the police, we shall be happy to do that.

Mr. Tony Banks: Has the Minister any information about whether Tamil Tigers were involved in the cruel assassination of Rajiv Gandhi? What communications have passed between Her Majesty's Government and the Indian Government about Mr. Gandhi's assassination?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No evidence of the kind suggested by the hon. Gentleman has come to our knowledge. Let us hope that evidence is soon available about the identity of

the perpetrators of that dreadful crime. Her Majesty's Government and, indeed, Her Majesty the Queen, have sent messages to Mr. Gandhi's family and to the Indian Government about that terrible incident.

Mr. Kilfedder: Does the Minister agree that the elections in Sri Lanka—which everyone concurred were free and fair—open up a period of political stability in that country? Does he agree that that, along with the exceptional talents of its people, will ensure that Sri Lanka plays a great and dominant role in the future?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I very much hope that my hon. Friend is right. We welcome the elections as having been free and fair. However, my hon. Friend will be aware that Sri Lanka has other problems to attend to before it can move swiftly forward on a path of prosperity.

Yugoslavia

8. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had any recent discussions with the Government of Yugoslavia.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I visited Yugoslavia from 25 to 28 February and met representatives of the Federal and Republican Governments. The Yugoslav Prime Minister, Mr. Markovic, called on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 April. I saw the deputy Foreign Minister on the same day. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in touch with the Foreign Minister.

Sir Russell Johnston: When the Minister contacts the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia, will he tell him, first, that in the view of all democratic opinion in Europe no military solution to Yugoslavia's regional and national problems would be acceptable and, secondly, that the British Government would be willing to argue in the European Community in favour of the EC's taking on a role of mediation and perhaps even providing a peace-keeping force?

Mr. Hogg: On the role of the Yugoslav army, I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be a disaster if it were used in the way that he described. It should be used only as a genuine peace-keeping force within Yugoslavia.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I do not think that the European Community should play such a role. However, we should explore the possibility of finding within the conference on security and co-operation in Europe some method for offering good offices to the republics and provinces of Yugoslavia. To achieve that and make it effective would require the consent of all relevant parties.

Mr. Wareing: Have not the Government shown a complacent attitude to Yugoslavia? Do not the ethnic troubles in Yugoslavia threaten to overflow into other parts of Europe? As Europeans in one European home, we now have a responsibility. Should not the Government make a positive attempt to bring the European Community into discussions with the Federal Government of Yugoslavia and recognise that Federal Government as a proper member of the Council of Europe?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has done his homework. We have not been complacent. Indeed, our intervention in early January was given credit by the Croatian people for having prevented an invasion of Croatia by the Yugoslav army at that time. I do not believe that the European Community has a role to play. I have said that the CSCE might have a role to play if we could persuade all the parties to agree to use their good offices.

Arab-Israel Dispute

9. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress to date in resolving the Arab-Israel dispute.

Mr. Hurd: We welcome continuing American efforts to restart the middle east peace process, as I emphasised to Mr. Baker in Washington on Monday. With our EC partners, we have given them our full support. There has been some progress towards acceptance of the idea of a peace conference. Important differences remain, but there is enough encouragement to wear down those differences in order to get a conference under way.

Mr. Hogg: Has the Foreign Secretary read the remarks attributed to Mr. David Gore-Booth, an Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office? Do those remarks assist the Government's endeavours with the peace process, and are senior civil servants at the Foreign Office entitled to make such speeches under the cloak of a personal capacity? Will the right hon. Gentleman please clarify the position on that?

Mr. Hurd: After speaking on 20 March to a meeting of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding, on lines which set out Government policy, Mr. Gore-Booth answered questions. A report on this appeared just the other day. Some of his answers gave personal views, not Government policy, as he made clear at the time. [**Hon. Members:** "Why?"] Mr. Gore-Booth is a talented and experienced public servant. I intend to take no further action.

Sir Dennis Walters: Despite the recent tendentious press attacks aimed at undermining Britain's role in the middle east, which have just been aired again, does not my right hon. Friend agree that Britain and Europe have an important part to play, either in supporting Secretary Baker's initiative or in replacing it if it is blocked because of Israeli intransigence, as, regrettably, now seems likely?

Mr. Hurd: I agree about supporting it. I do not believe that a European initiative could replace the active and energetic efforts of the United States. That is the view of the Twelve. We have deliberately stepped back from putting our own ideas and initiatives directly so as to give Mr. Baker's efforts a fair wind. I still think that that is the right policy.

Mr. Benn: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that there will be no permanent peace in the middle east until there is a Palestinian state? A clear statement on those lines by the British Government and other Governments would accelerate a long drawn out peace process that has no prospect of success while the Americans accept that there is an Israeli veto on the proposition.

Mr. Hurd: We believe in the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination. The outcome of that is not for us to decide. To get this process under way, a conference must be held, which must include both tracks of negotiation—between Israel and the Arab states, which are still in a state of war or a state of belligerency with her, and between Israel and representative Palestinians. That, in essence, is the Baker plan, and we believe that it is the only sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Latham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if progress is to be made there must be confidence-building measures on both sides? One important confidence-building measure, if the United Nations is represented at the conference, would be the rescinding of the "Zionism is racism" resolution.

Mr. Hurd: I think that that would be difficult to achieve, but my hon. Friend is right about confidence-building measures. An important confidence-building measure would be a stop to new settlements on the west bank. If that were forthcoming, it would be reasonable to ask Arab states to look at the operation of the boycott. It is possible to imagine, on both sides, confidence-building measures that would help the parties to get to grips with the essential central matters of substance.

Mr. Anderson: We pay tribute to the tireless efforts of Mr. Baker in seeking to find an acceptable peace formula for the middle east. Can the Foreign Secretary say whether, plausibly, there is any life left in those peace efforts, as Syria appears to have been written out of the script and the Israeli Prime Minister has said in terms that there will be no trading of land for peace?

Mr. Hurd: Following my talk with Mr. Baker on Monday, I believe that there is enough encouragement —though not a breakthrough—for him to persevere. That is also his view. The issues that have not yet been successfully tackled are the exact role of the United Nations in the process and whether the conference would be a once-for-all conference which would launch the discussions on the two tracks that I have described or whether it would be resumed from time to time.

Those are important points of difference. There is also the question of Palestinian representation, on which some progress has been made. But the points of difference are not so overwhelming as to justify writing off the whole process.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend really believe that Mr. Gore-Booth's not-so-youthful indiscretions really helped Britain in its role as an honest broker in the middle east? Does he agree that any Minister who was as indiscreet as that mandarin would have been asked for his or her resignation? Should not Mr. Gore-Booth be treated similarly?

Mr. Hurd: I have said what I have to say on that matter. When people go to meetings which they believe to be private and answer questions in an expressly personal capacity, the House must show some understanding of their position. I have confidence in Mr. Gore-Booth, with whom I have worked for a long time and, as I have said, I intend to take no further action in the matter. As my hon. Friend knows, we have close dialogue with the Government of Israel—perhaps closer and more intimate than for some years. I welcome that and intend to maintain it, and I see no difficulty in doing so.

Iraq

10. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet representatives of political groups within Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I met representatives of political groups from Iraq on 7 and 12 March and on 22 April. I have no date set for another meeting. However, representatives are in regular contact with Foreign Office officials.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May we have an assurance that every possible pressure will be kept on Saddam Hussein during the period of the discussions in Baghdad between the Kurdish leaders and the Iraqi Government? If the Iraqi Government in any way delay finalising those talks, can it be made very clear to them that they invite external intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq?

Mr. Hogg: We certainly think it desirable that the Iraqis should enter into an agreement with the Kurdish representatives with a view to establishing an autonomous region within Iraq. There are various points at which, under the Security Council resolutions, we can exercise pressure on the Iraqi Government. To the extent that that is proper, we shall do so.

Mr. Cormack: Is it not incomprehensible to many people that a beast like Saddam Hussein, against whom the world took up arms, should be able to bring to trial and sentence a British subject?

Mr. Hogg: I agree with my hon. Friend that that was a deplorable event. It was also in clear breach of a number of Security Council resolutions which required the release of third country nationals then held in Iraq. There are various types of pressure that we can put on Iraq. We have already made it plain that we shall be remarkably unsympathetic to any attempt to relax sanctions. Furthermore, we have made it plain that the attempt by the Iraqi Government to persuade us to unfreeze assets held within United Kingdom jurisdiction is likely to fail.

Cyprus

11. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support those Cypriot politicians who are working for a peaceful solution to the problem of partition in Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I recognise the hon. Member's close interest in this subject and, indeed, his wide knowledge of Greek culture. I am sure, therefore, that he will be pleased to know that Her Majesty's Government are giving full support to the United Nations Secretary-General's efforts to secure a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Cyprus dispute.

Mr. O'Hara: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that the beautiful island of Cyprus has seen far too much human misery and experienced far too much drag on its economy as a result of 17 years of partition? Does he

agree that, for historical reasons, Her Majesty's Government have a particular obligation to use their good offices to solve the problem? Does he agree that there has never been a better time for progress, with Turgut Ozal increasingly recognising that the Cyprus problem is a major block to his ambitions for good relations with the west? The Gulf war has drawn attention to other United Nations resolutions, which have not been so enthusiastically pursued. There is increasing recognition by politicians on both sides of the divide in Cyprus that there must be a peaceful solution. Will the Minister therefore send the Government's congratulations to President Georghios Vassiliou who, in this weekend's elections *[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a rather long question.

Mr. O'Hara: I am asking the Government to send congratulations to President Vassiliou because in the elections at the weekend two thirds of the Greek electorate of Cyprus voted for his policies for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's question. He will be aware that the "noises off" were raised not so much in disagreement, but because his question was a tiny bit prolix. The Government strongly support the efforts made by the United Nations and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the stature and importance of the United Nations in world affairs has increased substantially in the past few months. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the matter with the United Nations Secretary-General on 20 May. We shall continue to support the Secretary-General in his efforts.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does my hon. Friend the Minister believe that the United Nations should now make a stronger effort as there is a better atmosphere with the Turks in that part of the world? Surely the United Nations can now take firmer action.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the United Nations Secretary-General's representative is pursuing separate discussions with the parties to the dispute with a view to the resumption of inter-communal dialogue. He proposes to report to the Security Council in July and we very much hope that his report will be encouraging.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that hon. Members who take an ongoing interest in Cyprus argue for a united Cyprus in which the rights of both communities, Greek and Turkish, are honoured? Is he also aware that one of the great stumbling blocks is the attitude that Mr. Denktash repeatedly takes when Turkish Cypriots wish to meet Greek Cypriots to discuss how they want to see their island developed? Mr. Denktash always refuses to allow Turkish Cypriots to leave the north to meet Greek Cypriots. Will the Minister make those views known to Mr. Denktash and tell him that he is in no way building goodwill or confidence by that attitude?

Mr. Garel-Jones: As the hon. Gentleman will know as he takes a close interest in these matters, Greek Cypriots attach fundamental importance to territory, rights of return, settlement and property, while on the other hand, for the Turkish Cypriots, security and political equality are the key concerns. What we wish to see, what the hon. Gentleman wishes to see and what the United Nations is working towards is one state and two communities. We must keep our eyes firmly fixed on that.

Latin America

13. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in the dialogue between the European Community and Latin America.

Mr. Garel-Jones: This dialogue has been strengthened by the ministerial level discussions that the European Community held with the countries of central America in Managua on 18 and 19 March and with the Rio group in Luxembourg on 26 and 27 April.

Mr. Dickens: So that we get the British sales teams cracking in Latin America, will my hon. Friend outline to the House some of the commercial opportunities available to British sales forces?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The prospects for British exporters in the Latin American continent are very great—the more so now that countries there are fully open to democracy and are pursuing proper market policies. Latin America is a very promising market with 422 million people and a gross domestic product in 1989 of $840 billion. It offers substantial opportunities for British exporters who, in 1990, increased their penetration there by 16 per cent.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister agree that the self-sufficiency, indeed the very nature of much of the farming in South America, is being destroyed by the lure of easy loot from the common agricultural policy to provide feedstocks for the beef and butter mountains in Europe and that it is causing a dramatic and detrimental change to much local agriculture in South America?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. One of the most crucial issues facing Latin America at the moment is a successful outcome to the Uruguay round—an outcome which opens up European markets to the agricultural products of Latin America. That is an outcome for which Britain is pressing very strongly indeed.

Hong Kong

14. **Sir Michael Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in talks on the future development of the port and airport in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Talks with the Chinese Government on the Hong Kong airport project resumed on 18 May. We and the Chinese Government agree that Hong Kong needs a new airport, and we are making intensive efforts to secure Chinese support for the project.

Sir Michael Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that recent conversations with the Chinese Government and with the Hong Kong Government suggest that there is widespread support in principle for the early implementation of the project? Does he accept also that there is genuine cause for unease on the part of the Chinese Government over the long-term financial implications of the project? Will he keep an open mind on structures that would allow both governmental and

commercial linkage to look at some way in which the financial aspects of the project can be monitored without interfering with the administration of the project?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right. That is one of the points that we have been discussing with the Chinese for some time now and we are still discussing it today. We are seeking means of reassuring them on that point. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion.

Sir Peter Blaker: While the Government of Hong Kong must remain with and be seen to remain with the United Kingdom until 1997, is it not desirable in present circumstances that there should be many more exchanges of visits and much more dialogue between officials in Hong Kong and officials in China, in the interests of improving mutual understanding?

Mr. Hurd: I am certainly in favour of that. I believe that there should be—and, under the joint declaration, would be—gradually increasing co-operation and exchanges of visits on such matters. My right hon. Friend will also agree that everyone needs to be clear that the Hong Kong Government retain the ability to administer Hong Kong effectively between now and 1997.

United Nations

15. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other Governments and the United Nations to review the mechanisms and structures of the United Nations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We play a leading part in efforts by members states to bring about effective structures and efficient methods at the United Nations.

Mr. Sillars: Am I correct in saying that under the provisions of article 96 of the United Nations charter, taking account of the major organs of the United Nations and the specialist agencies, only the secretariat headed by the Secretary-General does not have power to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice? Would not it help the peaceful solution of disputes if he were given such a power?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of that supplementary question, which would have been difficult to answer in other circumstances. With all due deference and gratitude for that, however, I cannot be too enthusiastic in my reply. The position is broadly as the hon. Gentleman has described it. However, the United Nations bodies that need legal advice are those bodies which make the decisions—the General Assembly, the Security Council, and other bodies composed of member states. Those are the bodies that need advice from the International Court of Justice. Although we very much welcome all the hard work of the Secretary-General and the success that he has had, it would not be appropriate to press in the direction that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my hon. Friend note that the Prime Minister's excellent recent initiative in obtaining a common European policy on matters due to be discussed at the United Nations is a significant development and an important one within the European Community? Would not it also have the advantage of avoiding further discussion about whether Germany should become a member of the Security Council because it is most effectively influenced through Britain and France and the European Community common position?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, where there is a common European Community position, permanent members of the Security Council that are also members of the European Community, such as Britain, are more than happy to take account of it. We also make every effort to keep the rest of the Community involved in its activities.

Occupied Territories

16. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Foreign Secretary of Israel to discuss the future of the occupied territories.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has no plans for a further meeting with Mr. Levy at the moment, but he remains in regular contact with him, particularly on the peace process and the situation in the occupied territories. The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), met Mr. Levy at the EC-Israel Co-operation Council in Brussels on 14 May.

Mr. Cartwright: Will the Minister confirm that the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in the west bank and Gaza is just as unacceptable and wrong in principle as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait? Will he take every opportunity to make that simple fact clear and plain to the Israeli Government, whenever he meets them?

Mr. Hogg: What I shall do, whenever I have the opportunity, is to impress on everybody—the Palestinians, the Arab states, and the Israelis—the importance of starting a peace negotiation. It is that which they must do.

Mr. Sumberg: Does my hon. and learned Friend recall that, when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, one of the first people to back Iraq was Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organisation? Bearing that fact in mind, is it not unrealistic and unacceptable to pressurise the Israeli Government now into sitting down and negotiating with the PLO and others who seek Israel's destruction?

Mr. Hogg: The PLO certainly discredited itself by its conduct during the Gulf war. We are not pressurising the Israelis to sit down at the same table with the PLO, but we do say that it is extremely important that the Palestinians who are at the table are able to speak with authority and carry conviction among the people whom they purport to represent.

Mr. Janner: Before there are any further meetings with the Foreign Secretary of Israel, whether concerning the occupied territories or any other matter, would it not be a good idea for at least one Minister to dissociate the Government from the statements made by Mr. Gore-Booth, especially as they were made at a so-called private meeting reportedly attended by more than 100 people? Perhaps it would be better to move Mr. Gore-Booth so that he could represent Her Majesty's Government in Syria, Iraq or some other enlightened regime elsewhere in the world.

Mr. Hogg: I have to tell the hon. and learned Gentleman that when he gets to his feet I smell the strong smell of humbug.

Lebanon

17. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with the Lebanon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We congratulate President Hrawi and his Government on Lebanon's continuing progress towards peace and reconciliation. Their efforts enjoy our full support. I hope to visit Beirut soon.

Mr. Adley: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that there will be a widespread welcome for his forthcoming visit, notwithstanding the fact that Israeli tanks are yet again massing on the Lebanese border? Will he confirm that it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to support the Ta'if agreement and also the implementation of United Nations resolution 245, which calls on the Israelis to withdraw from the part of Lebanon that they are currently occupying?

Mr. Hogg: I am very much looking forward to going to Beirut. We welcome the fact that the Lebanese Government are reasserting control over that country. We think that the Ta'if agreement is an important element in that process. We look to an early withdrawal from the Lebanon of all foreign forces.

Mr. John D. Taylor: As the problem of the British hostages in Lebanon is indirectly linked with the Muslim hostages who went missing in the Christian enclave north of Beirut, and in view of the improved circumstances in the Lebanon, have the Government made any progress in identifying the location of the missing Muslim hostages?

Mr. Hogg: I will do all that I can when I am in the Lebanon to carry forward our policy of securing the release of hostages. There is no more important issue on our agenda on the Lebanon and Iran.

Burma

18. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the current Government in the republic of Burma.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend wrote to General Saw Maung, chairman of the ruling military council in Burma, on 6 July last year welcoming the democratic election in May and urging respect for human rights and for the wishes of the people expressed in that election. We have since reinforced that message several times.

Mr. Mitchell: Is my hon. Friend aware that while Burma may have moved away from the world headlines, Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and is banned from leading her party and taking part— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Come on, Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Some 25 Opposition Members of Parliament in Burma have been sentenced to long periods in prison, 3,000 people are political prisoners imprisoned without trial and 15,000 people have fled the country to escape arrest and intimidation. Will my hon. Friend ensure that that outrage is kept before the world's attention and that Her Majesty's Government make strong representations themselves and through the European Economic Community about this outrageous state of affairs?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to support the condemnation that my hon. Friend expressed. We condemn the failure of the Burmese military authorities to give power to the people who have been democratically elected. We condemn their outrages in terms of human rights and their imprisonment of political opponents—including, of course, the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for the first week after the recess?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Yes, Sir. The business for the week following the spring adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 3 JUNE—Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 4 JUNE—Second Reading of the Child Support Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE—Opposition day (12th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject for debate to be announced.

THURSDAY 6 JUNE—Remaining stages of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (No. 2) Bill.

FRIDAY 7 JUNE—Debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Subject for debate to be announced.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet to consider European Community documents as follows:

Tuesday 4 June at 4.30 pm:
Committee A will consider document No. 5518/91 relating to the import of animals.

Wednesday 5 June at 10.30 am:
Committee A will consider documents Nos. 10749/90 and 10837/90 relating to the specific character and origin marking of foodstuffs.
Committee B will consider document No. 8460/90 relating to data protection.

[Tuesday 4 June
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Committee Document
5518/91 Third Country Imports of Live Animals

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xviii (1990-91)

Wednesday 5 June
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 10749/90 Foodstuffs: Certificates of Specific Character
(b) 10837/90 Foodstuffs: Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-xii (1990-91) and HC 29-xx (1990-91)
(b) HC 29-xi (1990-91) and HC 29-xix (1990-91)

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Document
8460/90 Processing of Personal Data and Information Security
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-iv (1990-91).]

Dr. Cunningham: Given the urgent need to act on the issue of vicious dogs, why is not legislation to take the necessary action being introduced at the earliest opportunity, in the first week after the recess? As the Government have deliberately and consistently blocked proposals to introduce a dog registration scheme—against which the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Leader of the House have voted, against the advice even of their hon. Friends—may we have some assurance that when the legislation is published it will include provisions for a dog registration scheme?

We are to have yet another Local Government Finance Bill from this Government. People have lost count of the number of Local Government Finance Bills that we have had and of the changes that have been made. Does the Leader of the House recall the assurances that were given to hon. Members in all parts of the House during the debates on the Local Government Act 1984—that councils with small budgets would never be the subject of capping proposals under this Government? Does he recall that just a year ago the present Secretary of State for the Environment said, when he wrote to *The Times* on 10 May 1990——

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are business questions. The hon. Gentleman should ask about the business for the week following the spring recess.

Dr. Cunningham: I am speaking about the very business that is to occupy the House after the recess. Does the Leader of the House recall that the present Secretary of State for the Environment said that universal capping would be an act of centralisation which the nation could well do without? What has changed since May of last year when the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said that? Can we be told when this Bill, the most centralising and the most ignominious control of local government ever introduced, is to be published? When will the Bill be in the Vote Office? As the Leader of the House —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that we are going into recess tomorrow, but could we just settle down and deal with today's business in a serious manner?

Dr. Cunningham: Has the Leader of the House seen the decision of the Royal College of Nursing, unanimously taken, to press the Government yet again to stop——

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have heard nothing out of order, but what is it?

Mr. Holt: It is only a short while ago that, when it came to business questions, the Leader of the Opposition undertook that role. Arbitrarily, the Labour party changed that. One of the reasons that it changed it was the verbosity of the Leader of the Opposition. He is now——

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Well, I am afraid some points of order are bogus.

I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I am not responsible for whom the Opposition Front Bench designate for business questions. It is not a point of order.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Holt: It is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please resume his seat?

Mr. Holt: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that you will not allow this side of the House to speak. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is behaving in his usual boorish fashion.

Dr. Cunningham: We are well used to the whingeing from the Conservative side of the House.

Has the Leader of the House seen the decision, unanimously taken, by the Royal College of Nursing to press the Government yet again to stop proposals for the creation of new national health service trusts? As the Government have a day in the first week after the recess, the Friday, to which they have not yet allocated a subject, why can we not have a debate in Government time about the crisis in the national health service so that, if the Government have such a good story to tell, the nation can hear it?

Mr. MacGregor: First of all, the hon. Gentleman asked me about dogs. As he knows, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be making a statement about legislation immediately after this business statement. We shall introduce legislation as soon as possible, and that means very soon. I note that the Labour party has given its broad support to the objectives of this measure. As my right hon. Friend will make clear, we are endeavouring to make the Bill concentrate on the key issue of the breeds of dog that are causing the present difficulties. I voted against dog registration for a variety of reasons, one of which was that it did not seem to focus on this key issue, which is what the Bill is about. The country expects us to act on this issue as soon as possible, and will want speedy action on the relevant measures. The country will not forgive the Labour party if it tries to obstruct the measure. I hope that it will not, but will co-operate fully to achieve the objectives of the Bill as quickly as possible.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked about the Local Government Finance Bill. One of the issues on which that Bill focuses is an increase in capping on authorities with a turnover of less than £15 million. The hon. Gentleman will know that since last year there has been a major change, which is that we propose to introduce the council tax. That tax has many merits and, unlike the Labour proposals, it deals with the criticisms of both the domestic rating system and the community charge. As we said in the consultative documents on the council tax, it is necessary to ensure that we have some protection against authorities that substantially increase expenditure. For the hon. Gentleman to claim that this is a great centralising measure is, like so many of his remarks on these issues, right over the top. We already have considerable capping powers. As I have explained to him, we now propose a council tax rather than the community charge.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the Bill is likely to be published. It will be published by the time the House rises tomorrow. Therefore, we shall be giving the normal two weekends for the Bill to be considered before the debate on Monday 3 June.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about national health service trusts. I am glad that he used the phrase "national health service trusts" which, of course, makes it absolutely clear that the trusts are part of the national health service. We have made it clear that we will continue this policy because it is very much in the interests of the funding of the national health service that all its expenditure is as efficient as possible. The NHS trusts are a way of achieving that.

As for Friday's debate, the hon. Gentleman will know that on recent business statements I have been urged to find time for debates on a wide range of issues. We now have an embarrassment of choices. We have already had many debates on the national health service, and the House has urged me to consider other subjects on which we have not had a recent debate. We are endeavouring to decide which of those many subjects should be chosen for 7 June.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend find time to make a statement to the House not only to confirm that questions to the Secretary of State for Health on hospital trusts within the national health service are in order, but to follow up inquiries which I trust he has made into yesterday's activities in the House when the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) sought to mislead the House and, even more disgracefully, sought to involve in a party political charade a Clerk of the Table Office?

Mr. MacGregor: I should make the position clear, as it was made clear yesterday by you, Mr. Speaker, when you said:

"The answer to that question . . . is yes."

That is absolutely unequivocal, and you went on to say:

"I have already said that the Table Office is accepting questions."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 782.]

This is the second time that the Labour party has raised a wholly inaccurate and wrong scare about NHS trusts. I am sure that the House will regret the fact that, on both occasions, the Labour party has not seen fit to withdraw.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Leader of the House has mentioned legislation on dogs but, although he might reasonably expect co-operation to get it through speedily, does he accept that there should be careful consideration of the terms of such legislation? Will he guarantee that adequate time will be given in both Houses for consideration of the Bill?

In the first week after the recess, what measures will create one more job or do something to decrease the growing number of the unemployed in this country? Can we have a debate on the growing scandal of unemployment?

Mr. MacGregor: On the second point, I have already said on many occasions that I am perfectly happy for the question of unemployment to be raised in the House as often as possible, because our record on unemployment measures is streets ahead of that of the Opposition. We have had many opportunities to debate that issue.

On the first point, we are anxious to publish the Bill as soon as possible, so that the House will have the opportunity to consider it. Clearly, we want proper parliamentary consideration of it in both Houses. Given the urgency of the situation and the desirability of ensuring that the dreadful incidents that have occurred recently do not recur or, at least, that we take every possible action to prevent them from recurring, I am sure that the House will agree that it is important to act quickly.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Government's response to the previous two Procedure Committee reports showed considerable

[Sir Peter Emery]

agreement with many of its recommendations? They need to be debated in the House, as does the resolution for them to come into operation. I wonder whether we might have a debate on that next week, or, if not, very soon afterwards.

Mr. MacGregor: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to his work as Chairman of that Committee and to all the members of the Committee. The effectiveness of the Committee's work is shown by the fact that, as he says, the Government have accepted many of its recommendations. The first stage is clearly for me to put the orders on the Order Paper, which I hope to do fairly shortly after we return. I should then wish to give the House a short time to consider them, and I hope to be able to deal with that before the House rises.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Did the Leader of the House see the excellent publicity and does he know of the great public interest in the launch of the Labour party's proposal to set up a Greater London authority to act as a strategic authority for London? I have a copy here if he would like to see it. In view of the fact that he has not announced—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give back the silver."] I will give it back when we have the Greater London authority. As the Leader of the House has not announced a subject for the Adjournment debate on 7 June, may we have a debate on strategic planning in London and on the fact that, under this Government, the standard of living and of life in London has deteriorated rapidly?

Mr. MacGregor: I have certainly seen the publicity and I have also read some of the leaders about the Labour party's proposals, which were pretty devastating critiques. It is clear that the bureaucratic, profligate and extremist Greater London council, of which the hon. Gentleman was a member, was deservedly unloved and that its passing was understandably unlamented. The proposal to reincarnate son of GLC will go down extremely badly with the electorate because it was not a period or an institution that was popular or effective.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on London so that the widest possible publicity can be given to the Labour party's document? The Labour party speaks about creating a vision of quality, but the people of London will see that the creation of a Greater London authority means a vision of filthy streets, uncollected rents, rotten services and overweaning bureaucracy. Is not the Labour party trying merely to saddle all Londoners with more red ink, more red tape and more red Ken?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and that point has been made by commentators this morning. There is no doubt that no one was sad to see the Greater London council go except for people such as the hon. Members for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). No one else was. Its passing was unlamented and it will remain so.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): In view of the typically charming, friendly and generous refusal of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), to reply to the question on Mr. Gore-Booth, may we have a debate on whether civil servants who speak in so-called private meetings attended by more than 100 people are entitled to put forward their views in a private capacity and continue in their jobs when in the process they are palpably speaking against Government policy as expressed by everyone other than the Minister of State?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary dealt with the matter during Question Time and I have nothing to add to what he said.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): May we have a debate as soon as possible on priorities in public spending? Bearing in mind that Nye Bevan once said that socialism is the language of priorities, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a copy of the book "What Nye said" to be placed in the Library of the House? Unfortunately, although the Leader of the Opposition claims authorship of the book in several of his "Who's Who" entries, the Library can find absolutely no trace of it. Would it not benefit all hon. Members to have the views of the Leader of the Opposition on priorities as an absolute, overriding and top priority?

Mr. MacGregor: I have certainly noted my hon. Friend's remarks. I would recommend another book which, if I recall correctly, was called "Inside the Treasury", written by Lord Barnett—Joel Barnett—Chief Secretary to the Treasury during a horrendous period under the previous Labour Government when public expenditure went completely out of control. It is an interesting book because it is riddled with quotations on how the Labour party succumbed to every spending pressure and simply did not control public expenditure. In the coming months, we need many more opportunities to debate that, because it is exactly what would happen again.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In view of the pressure on business today, will hon. Members concentrate on the business statement and not deal with matters which might more correctly be dealt with on a different platform?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Leader of the House will be aware of the important statement that was made earlier this week about post-school education in Scotland, as it is a matter in which he takes a great interest. Given the continuing contravention by the House of its Standing Orders, in that there is not a Scottish Select Committee to discuss such vital matters, does the right hon. Gentleman expect that such a Committee will be established after the recess? At the very least, will the Scottish Grand Committee, which has not met for virtually a year, be convened, or have the usual channels clogged up?

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to what I have said on several occasions in the House about a Scottish Select Committee and I do not expect to add anything more after the recess. I am happy to discuss with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the means by which we can debate his excellent proposals.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): In view of the increase in crime, especially auto crime, in north Yorkshire, will my

right hon. Friend arrange a debate at the earliest opportunity on whether we need to extend the powers available to the judiciary and why magistrates in York have never in the last year used the maximum penalties available to them? Does he agree that such a debate would clearly illustrate that crime does not pay?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, my hon. Friend's message is important and we wish to find every opportunity to put that message over. I cannot promise any Government time to debate that matter in the near future, but he will know that other means are available to him to raise the matter in the House.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the Leader of the House provide time for an early debate on this week's Home Affairs Select Committee report on horse racing? Will he explain to the Home Secretary that all my hon. Friends, with the exception of one, who are active members of the all-party group on bloodstock industries and horse racing—incidentally, none of them were called as witnesses by the Committee—wish to express dissent on two or three of the recommendations? They particularly wish to dissent from the criticism of the Jockey Club and the recommendation that it should be replaced.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government will respond to all Select Committee reports in the normal way and within the normal time scale. It may be appropriate to find time for a debate after that.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of many hon. Members on his excellent speech pointing out that many building societies are not reducing their interest rates as fast as the Government are reducing the bank base rate? If that continues and banks do not reduce their mortgage lending rates as fast as the Chancellor is reducing the minimum lending rate, it may be necessary to have a debate in the House on competition in the financial services sector.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that more building societies will follow the lead of some that have already offered greater choice and flexibility to borrowers who had previously had annual repayment schemes. That was the real point that I was making last night. It is a matter for the building societies and their borrowers, because I believe in choice and variety.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Is the Leader of the House as concerned as some Opposition Members at the development of the European Commission's drafting of food legislation on certain important British products that we have enjoyed in this country for many years, such as mince and beautiful sausages? Our flavoured crisps are now being attacked. Those are important items in the lives of many people. We should have a debate in the House on behalf of the people of this country who want to continue to enjoy products against which the Commission is discriminating.

Mr. MacGregor: I have long experience of those matters. Sometimes, inappropriate proposals are made at an early stage and they should not be pursued by the Commission. The proposal to prohibit flavoured crisps falls into that category. It is not necessary to debate the matter in the House, because any moves to prohibit the production of that food item, which has been marketed safely for years in the United Kingdom, will be opposed by the Government, and we are already making our position clear.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Following the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), does the Leader of the House agree that it is high time that we had a debate on procedure and abuse thereof? That would ensure that we did not have the disgraceful scenes that occurred on the Floor of the House yesterday when, under the guise of bogus points of order, the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) wantonly misled the House by saying that the Table Office——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that no Member wantonly or deliberately misleads the House. Will he withdraw that comment, please?

Mr. MacKay: I withdraw the word "wantonly", Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacGregor: I thought that there was more to come.

It was uncharacteristic of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to pursue a matter that turned out to be inaccurate. He does not normally do so and is falling into the trap of some of his hon. Friends who are pursuing wrong issues and giving an inaccurate impression of NHS trusts.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Since, in South Africa today, so many political prisoners are on hunger strike and the peace process there is at a dangerous stage, will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that the Government will use the recess to put pressure on President de Klerk to honour his obligations and guarantee that the Foreign Secretary will make a statement immediately after the recess?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, I cannot give any guarantees about statements, but I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said and I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate on dog registration that could go wider than the debate on the Bill? Would not that give the House an opportunity to remind the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that the essence of a dog registration scheme is ownership, and that in none of the attacks with which the Bill will deal has the issue of ownership been in any doubt, so the idea that a dog registration scheme is relevant to this issue is wrong?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree very much with my hon. Friend and think that, if the Bill is to progress speedily through both Houses—as we wish it to do and as, I think, the country wants us to ensure—it will be important to concentrate precisely on the matters in question and find solutions that are entirely pertinent to the problem.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does the Leader of the House not have a debate about unemployment? For the past 13 months the figures have soared and there are now probably many more than 3 million people unemployed if we include women who do not appear on the register and the half a million young people who are on slave labour schemes. Is it not a fact that the jobs of

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ambulance men and women up and down the country are now placed in jeopardy because the NHS and the trusts are refusing to cart people back and forward from hospital? Therefore, the 3 million unemployed will be added to by numerous ambulance workers up and down the country. Let us have a debate on unemployment.

Mr. MacGregor: I have said already that we are happy to debate the issue all the time, because our employment policies are very much more designed to deal with ensuring permanent, secure, long-term jobs, which are viable and deliver goods and services effectively. That is part of the answer to the hon. Gentleman's point about NHS trusts.

It is open to the Opposition to use their Supply day for a debate on the subject. I hope that they will, because it will enable us to contrast our policies and proposals with theirs, and demonstrate yet again the point on which they seem to be so sensitive—a national minimum wage will destroy many jobs. I shall be happy for us to have a Supply day debate on the subject. The hon. Gentleman might suggest it to the relevant Opposition spokesmen.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does the Leader of the House consider, as I do, that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) owes the excellent staff of the House an apology? At exactly the same time as the hon. Member was saying yesterday that staff were refusing to accept questions—an allegation which I have just heard him repeat today—exasperated staff in the Table Office were protesting that they had been given no such instructions; I heard them say so. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government of this country are more than happy to answer questions in debates on subjects that involve the spending of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on NHS patients in NHS hospitals, whatever they are called, so that the Government can take the credit when the benefit of the reforms comes to the fore?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the Government are happy to answer all questions on the NHS because their record is an extremely creditable one. I believe that our policies ensure not only substantial funding, but the effective delivery of services within that funding. It is noticeable that the Labour party has no such policies, which is why it resorts to inaccurate side issues —it is obvious that that is all it can do.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Last week, the Leader of the House said that he could not find time this week for a statement on the World in Action programme about the Larry Goodman empire. In the light of evidence that Government servants have been in receipt of gifts from Mr. Goodman and agriculture in Northern Ireland is suffering as a result of the way in which his empire has spread, will the Leader of the House re-examine the subject and attempt to find time for such a statement when we return after the recess—or are we waiting for the inquiry in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, I cannot find time for that in the week after the recess, but I shall discuss that matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): When my right hon. Friend considers finding time for a debate on procedures in the House, will he also consider the question of information to hon. Members about what is taking place in the House because I was rather concerned to see early-day motion 861 on coal mining subsidence?

[That this House congratulates the honourable Member for Sherwood on persuading Her Majesty's Government to include the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill in this year's parliamentary programme; congratulates Her Majesty's Government and the Secretary of State for Energy on making the parliamentary time available; notes that this Bill completed its Second Reading on 4th February of this session and all its remaining stages in the House of Commons on 22nd April; and is surprised that this information does not appear yet to have reached the honourable Members for Llanelli, Brent East, Clydesdale, Birmingham, Perry Barr, and Preston, all of whom signed Early Day Motion Number 78, condemning Her Majesty's Government for failing to introduce the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill after it had completed all its stages in the House of Commons.]

That reminds us that five Labour Members, including a Front-Bench spokesman, continued to press the Government to take action on coal mining subsidence even after the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill passed all its stages in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was interested to see that six Opposition Members were urging the Government to do something that we had already done and that had taken up a great deal of parliamentary time, which suggests that some Opposition Members are not exactly following what is going on.

The Government have acted on that matter and I pay a special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), as does the early-day motion, because that subject has been a great interest of his and he has had a great deal to do with the fact that we have acted so swiftly on the matter.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is there to be a statement on the further responsibilities which are apparently to be given to the Government Chief Whip? We are told in the newspapers that he is to be the Government's troubleshooter—Mr. Fixit. If that is the case, is not it necessary to have a statement because surely, with the way in which the Government are facing a crisis virtually every day, the Chief Whip's job will be virtually redundant, as he will be so busy occupying himself with his second job?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that Conservative Members feel that it is totally unnecessary to have a debate because we know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) is doing an admirable job and I am sure that he will continue to do so. I am also sure that he is glad that anything to do with handling the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is not one of his responsibilities.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that the wonderful news that inflation has reduced by a huge amount to 6·4 per cent. seems not to have reached the Opposition? Therefore, will he consider giving time at the next available opportunity for a debate on the success of

the Government's economic policies and for a comparison of our policies with those of the Opposition, which revolve around spend-tax, spend-tax, spend-tax?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, I agree with him, and I am sure that when the House gets back after the recess we shall concentrate upon such matters.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I wonder whether the Leader of the House would consider early-day motion 868, tabled by myself and 134 right hon. and hon. Members yesterday,

[That this House expresses deep concern and sympathy at the death of Jeff Jones, a Rhondda miner, at the Wem Tern licensed coal mine at Pencoed, Mid Glamorgan, and asks the Secretary of State for Energy to hold an immediate inquiry into the safety standards at this and other licensed coal mines and to publish quarterly statistics on safety inspections in those mines.]

May I ask for an early debate on the issue, and especially on the subject of safety in mines? I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, together with right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, would like to join me in recording our sympathy to the widow June and daughters Gemma and Jade at their home in Stanley road in Gelli, Rhondda, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). I am sure that it will be a comfort to them to know that we share their grief in this tragedy.

It is always a sad day when there is a death in a mine and it is a constant reminder of the days when deaths occurred in the mines every week and sometimes every day, especially in Wales. I pay tribute to all those who burrowed with hands, picks and shovels to reach Mr. Jones but who found, after 22 hours, that they had worked in vain. This is yet another reminder that safety in our mines must always be a top priority for any Government.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I come from a coal-mining village and therefore I very much share the sentiments that he has expressed. I am sure that the whole House will wish to express its sympathy to the relatives of Mr. Jones and to pay a tribute to the work that was done yesterday, alas to no avail.

The Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate has responded, as it always does in the case of a fatal accident, by initiating a full and thorough investigation. We must now await the outcome of that investigation, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter so that it enables the whole House to express its sympathy in this tragic incident.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the question of having another debate on the national health service, specifically on the distribution of spending within the NHS? Is he aware that, within the North West Thames region, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire comprise 45 per cent. of the population, but benefit from only 32 per cent. of spending? The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that a Labour Government would provide no extra money for the NHS, and that the Labour party will fight to prevent redistribution of money away from London to where people actually live. My constituents and others would suffer the effects of such Labour policies.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend will have other opportunites to make his point in the House, but I cannot say when we shall be able to have another debate on the NHS in Government time. My hon. Friend has made the important point, which should be made constantly, that the Opposition have made it clear that they will not be able to spend any more on the NHS than we have.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is it not remarkable that we have not debated the Gulf since 21 January—a few days after the outbreak of war? If the outcome of the war did not justify a debate, surely developments in Iraq since then have shown that a debate is long overdue.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said, I am aware of the desire of many hon. Members to debate this matter, but we must wait for an appropriate time. There are many pressures on Government time between now and the summer recess.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I wonder whether we could have a debate on the disgraceful, unspecific and cowardly attack on a highly respected public servant, the Hon. David Gore-Booth—particularly when that attack has been co-ordinated by people who have at heart not the interests of the United Kingdom, but the interests of a foreign country, which has quite rightly been the subject of widespread criticism in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to that at Question Time today. I was unable to be present, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend will take note of what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, SAI in my constituency is likely to close. That is a disgrace, because it is the most efficient fertiliser plant in the United Kingdom. Jobs are important in Leith and throughout the United Kingdom. Can we have a debate about that issue at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a debate on a specific plant. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue that matter, he will have to do so in other ways.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Further to the point of order that I raised on Friday, when I urged Treasury Ministers to come to the House to justify and extend the excellent policies that have led to a dramatic fall in the rate of inflation, can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate so that the House may fully understand that the Government have reduced inflation from 10·5 to 6·4 per cent.? Has my right hon. Friend noted that that rate compares with an average of 15·5 per cent. under the previous Labour Government? The present Government understand that beating inflation is the only way to remove a socially divisive disease. That underlines our estimate of caring. By allowing inflation to rip when it was in office, the Labour party damaged the people who could least afford to be affected. This Government care and a Labour Government cannot deliver their promises.

Mr. MacGregor: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Reducing inflation to levels comparable with those of our major competitors is the Government's overriding

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priority. I am sure that there will be opportunities throughout the summer and beyond, as inflation continues to come down, to make the points that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House consider having an early debate—perhaps immediately after the spring recess—on the problems facing the car industry? Grave concern has been expressed about the effect of Government policies on the industry. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should arrange such a debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I must make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we have a heavy legislative programme to complete in Government time. There are many opportunities for debates outside Government time, and that is how the subject will have to be pursued.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The debate on 7 June should be on the future government of London, as many people regard the proposed Greater London authority as bureaucratic, bolshevik and unwanted. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the proposed Greater London authority would have more elected members than the old Greater London council? Is he aware that London Labour councils have the worst record for the collection of rates and for empty council houses, whereas Conservative councils have the best school records in London?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes some effective points. As I said, I do not believe that the people of London want a return to the GLC.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a statement to the House on the continued infiltration of the British security industry by organised crime, especially in the leisure industry? More people are killed and injured each year in Britain by rogue bouncers than by rogue dogs. Every day of the week, someone is injured or even killed by bouncers whose companies have been infiltrated by organised crime. The Secretary of State should make a statement on regulating the industry to drive bouncer companies and those who are involved in organised crime out of legitimate interests such as security.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall not go into the issues or respond to the allegations that the hon. Gentleman made, but he asked for a statement. I do not know whether a statement would be appropriate, but my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is in the Chamber and will have heard what he said.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): May I wholeheartedly support the request that was made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and by some of my hon. Friends for a further debate on the provision of health care so that we can set out again and again the Government's superb record in the past 12 years, so that I can draw attention to the brand new £18 million community hospital in Cannock and to the increased employment opportunities at the Mental Health Foundation for Mid-Staffordshire NHS trust, so that I may expose the shroud-waving hypocrisy of Opposition Members and so that the Labour party may formally, on the Floor of the House, retract the disgraceful allegations contained in the notorious leaflet that it issued at Monmouth, which suggested that NHS trust hospitals were opting out of the NHS?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that there will be many opportunities for my hon. Friend to make his effective points about the considerable progress in his constituency and about the Labour party's policy. There will be opportunities, therefore, to continue to ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the allegations that were made in the leaflet to which my hon. Friend drew attention.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): May we have a debate to explore why the Government acquiesced last Saturday in allowing General Augusto Pinochet to arrive at British Aerospace's private aerodrome at Hatfield? On a day when millions of people are mourning the assassination of the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, can the Government have forgotten that Pinochet organised the assassination of the elected President of Chile, Salvador Allende, and in the 1970s and 1980s murdered thousands of decent people in Chile? Is it now Government policy that, after a set number of years, the murder of a head of state is a sanatised, politically acceptable act, as long as the perpetrator is coming here to buy arms?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention, but I cannot see scope for a debate on the issue in the forthcoming week.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend give further urgent consideration to the possibility of having a debate on a national minimum wage? Although the Labour Fabian Society has made it clear that such a policy would cost 800,000 jobs, and although we all know that the figure would be twice as high, does not it remain a key policy of the Labour party, and should not we have a chance to debate it as a matter of urgency in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is clear that that proposal will result in the loss of a very considerable number of jobs. It is interesting that the Fabian Society now corroborates that fact and gives its own estimate. We shall have many opportunities in the weeks ahead to continue to make these points, and I note the embarassment of the Labour party every time the proposal for a national minimum wage is raised.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The Leader of the House said last week that it would be inappropriate to have a debate on the future of ICI, on the ground that

"That would be a matter for the takeover panel".—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 433.]

Last Friday, the takeover panel gave the green light to Hanson, the asset stripper, causing a great deal of concern in the country at large and to many of my constituents who work for ICI. Will the Leader of the House consider the provision of time to debate this important matter—we are dealing here with the leading manufacturer and second largest exporter in this country—or does he intend to wait for the recess, when Hanson can act without our having any democratic input whatsoever?

Mr. MacGregor: There is no question of our waiting for the recess. We do not have a situation in which action of

the sort that I outlined might have to be taken. In my comments last week on referrals, I mentioned not only the takeover panel but also two other bodies. We are not in a situation in which that action is triggered. That being the case, it would not be appropriate to have a debate.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I support the suggestion that we should have a debate on the visit of General Pinochet to this country. That would give us an opportunity to highlight the fact that the Government neither received General Pinochet nor conferred on him an order of knighthood, as happened during the term of the last Labour Government, when President Ceausescu visited this country.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the point that he has made.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I ask the Leader of the House to accept that, following the savage attack on Rucksana Khan, the vast majority of people understand that if effective action is to be taken against dangerous dogs it must be based on a national dog register? Will the Leader of the House ensure that when the Government's Bill is introduced it will be debated as quickly as possible, and that it will be framed in such a way as to enable the House to take a clear decision on the establishment of a national dog register? Will he give an undertaking that, if an amendment to this end is moved, Conservative Members will have a free vote so that they may support something that clearly now has the support of a vast majority of the British people?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already expressed my own view. I do not believe that the issue to be addressed by the Bill—an issue about which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement shortly—is related to a dog registration scheme. It is important that the Bill should focus on the emergency measures that are necessary to prevent, if possible, any further tragic incidents such as the one that involved the hon. Gentleman's constituent. That is the importance of getting on quickly with this measure.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): As my right hon. Friend has not yet decided the business for 7 June, may I commend to him the idea of arranging a debate on the need for a national lottery, for which there is a great deal of support among Conservative Members?

Mr. MacGregor: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion, but it is unlikely that we shall be able to debate that matter for a whole day, as many other issues have been raised. My hon. Friend knows very well that there are other ways in which he personally can pursue the matter.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): As the Leader of the House will be aware, there has been only one item of Scottish legislation this Session. Therefore, as has been pointed out already, we have had very little opportunity to debate Scottish issues. Can the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on the Scottish economy, the Scottish national health service, or primary school testing in Scotland, all of which are matters of policy in which there is considerable public interest? It is a very long time since there was any Scottish debate on the Floor of the House, and there has certainly been no debate in the Scottish Grand Committee.

Mr. MacGregor: I will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's point. I am sure that he recognises that there are many opportunities for those issues to be raised in other debates in the House. However, I will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a statement on the reporting of national health service matters to Parliament and in particular on the question of trusts? May we have an assurance in that statement that there will be no distinction in the way in which questions on health service trusts are answered as opposed to questions about other hospitals that remain in the national health service? At the moment, questions about the internal workings of hospitals can be answered fully by Ministers. May we have the same assurance about questions on health service trust matters?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is again misleading the House and making the wrong point if he tries to suggest that somehow trust hospitals are outside the NHS. My right hon. and hon. Friends will continue to answer questions fully on the health service.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a debate at the earliest possible moment on the safety of fishermen and fishing vessels? If that is not possible, may we have in the very near future—perhaps in the first week after the recess—a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport on the regulations governing the safety of our fishermen? For some years I have been seeking to persuade the Department of Transport to invoke regulations allowing for the provision of immersion suits on fishing vessels. The Department of Transport has refused that sensible measure. I discovered yesterday that the European Commission is to introduce a draft directive on the safety of fishermen that will include among many other things the provision of immersion suits on all fishing vessels above a certain size. Why is the European Community leading us? The Government should have taken such a decision years ago.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not aware of that particular Commission proposal, if indeed it is such at this stage. However, I will raise that point with my two right hon. Friends who are responsible for those matters.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Leader of the House find time after the recess to allow the Government to repudiate the disgraceful behaviour of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) who has been parading her pro-apartheid views around South Africa, including—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has not been here very long. Normally, if that kind of attack is made on another hon. Member, prior notice is given about it.

Mr. Hain: It may be a case of post-prime ministerial senility.

Mr. MacGregor: That question shows that the hon. Gentleman has a great deal to learn in this House. I certainly do not intend to find time to respond to a charge of that kind.

Dangerous Dogs

4.27 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, I would like to make a statement about dangerous dogs.

As we are all aware, there have been a number of recent attacks by dogs which have left their victims very badly injured. The first of those was the horrific attack on 8 May by two pit bull terriers on Mr. Frank Tempest, which has left him with severe facial and other injuries. The second was an attack on a two-year-old child by a pit bull terrier owned by her grandparents. The third incident, which took place last Saturday, left a six-year-old Bradford girl, Rucksana Khan, very seriously injured. The whole House will wish to join me in expressing sympathy for the victims of those dreadful attacks and our wishes for their recovery. Those most recent attacks were of a different degree of seriousness altogether from the great majority of dog-biting incidents.

All three were carried out by American pit bull terriers. The American pit bull terrier is a cross-breed dog, specifically bred for fighting and, in many cases, trained to be aggressive. As has been tragically shown, it is capable of vicious and sustained assault without warning or provocation. Once a pit bull terrier has started an attack, it has been shown to be impossible for full-grown adults to prevent the dog from causing horrific injuries.

The public are increasingly concerned about attacks by those vicious dogs and are entitled to look to the Government to take action to tackle the problem. I have therefore decided to bring before the House as soon as possible this Session legislation which will ban the breeding and ownership of pit bull terriers and other dogs bred especially for fighting. Also included in the ban will be the Japanese tosa, a dog bred for fighting which, apparently, can weigh up to 17 stone. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, we have taken action to ban the import of those dogs, as from midnight last night.

I emphasise that the ban will initially apply only to those breeds of fighting dogs, but it is clearly important to prevent new and dangerous breeds coming in to replace dogs which have been banned from domestic ownership. I understand that there are three other possible breeds in the world today.

The legislation will therefore include powers to add other types of fighting dogs to those which are banned.

It is essential to rid the country of the danger from such dogs. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the House yesterday, they have no place in our homes. Owners of those fighting dogs may be able to return them to their country of origin.

It has been put to me that it would be possible to make those dogs safe by neutering them. I am advised that that policy is unlikely to be effective. I am ready to consider further evidence on that point with experts, including the veterinary profession. If that will not be effective, the ban on dogs bred for fighting will mean, sadly, that those types of dogs have to be put down.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the veterinary profession have also suggested that there could be some specific and very tightly drawn exemptions to the ban, and I will be considering that suggestion. I am also considering the question of compensation for owners whose dogs are destroyed.

There were many attacks by dogs last year. The types of dogs responsible for those attacks are numerous, and include breeds such as alsatians, rottweilers, terriers and collies. Many of those attacks, unfortunately, can be laid at the door of irresponsible owners. The Government have always recognised that. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 made the law to control dogs more effective. Courts can now guarantee the destruction of any dog which has shown itself to be dangerous and, as a result, it is quickly put down. That is an important step forward.

Last year, the Government issued a consultation paper on the control of dogs and proposed a number of measures to bring about the safer control of dogs and powers to penalise the irresponsible owner. The response to the consultation paper shows an encouraging measure of support for such action. That includes a tougher criminal offence to penalise dog owners, whatever the breed, who fail to keep their dogs safely under control in public, as well as a power to allow a court to specify the control of a particular dog of any type. That could include muzzling.

The Leader of the Opposition indicated in the House yesterday that the Opposition would co-operate in getting such measures on to the statute book as quickly as possible. I hope that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will confirm that in his response today.

Dogs, Mr. Speaker, can provide companionship, friendship and comfort, and they do that for many people, but there is a clear distinction in the public's mind between the domestic pet and a dog that is bred to fight and kill. I hope that our proposals to ban those most dangerous of dogs will therefore command the full support of the House and pass quickly into law.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I first join the Home Secretary in offering the Opposition's sympathy for the victims of dog attacks—about 10 a month—who have suffered over the past two years, particularly those to whom our attention was drawn this afternoon? May I go on to welcome the proposal to ban the import of specified categories of vicious dogs and the Government's intention to legislate for the prohibition of their ownership?

The Home Secretary will not be surprised to receive our support for a policy to reduce the number of attacks by such dogs. During the Committee proceedings on the Environmental Protection Bill in March 1990, the Opposition made comprehensive proposals that covered all that he has said today. Those proposals were rejected by the Government and voted down despite Opposition support.

The Home Secretary asked for the Opposition's specific agreement to facilitate the passage of necessary legislation. Of course he has that assurance. The problem is that none of us can be clear what the Home Secretary means by the intentionally imprecise phrase "such legislation", other than the specific ban on a limited number of species. Other action is necessary, but the Home Secretary simply says that there may be legislation providing tougher penalties for owners whose dogs are not kept under proper control. He says that there could be a law requiring muzzling.

Today's statement was disappointingly vague, and will be seen as inadequate by all who have already complained that the Government are not acting with sufficient speed or resolution. This is no time for doubt or prevarication. With 10 serious attacks taking place each month, action is

urgently needed, and I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman what that should include, in addition to the general prohibition announced today.

Of course, the responsibility for preventing attacks must lie with the dog's owners. My questions are about the Home Secretary's willingness, or will, to take the necessary action to ensure that dog owners behave responsibly.

First, will the right hon. Gentleman introduce stringent safety rules requiring all owners of potentially dangerous dogs to keep them in secure conditions and to allow them into public places only under such control that the safety of the public is assured? That must usually mean their being kept on leads and muzzled.

Secondly, does the right hon. Gentleman understand that there are some breeds of dog which, although they are occasionally dangerous, it would be wrong to prohibit altogether? Nevertheless, we believe that there must be some safety standards for their ownership, so I ask the Home Secretary to introduce substantial penalties for any infringement of the safety rules that I have described. Will he provide the necessary resources to ensure that those rules are enforced?

Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman place an obligation on owners of specified potentially dangerous breeds to take out third party insurance cover so that those whom such dogs damage can be compensated? In one other respect, the right hon. Gentleman was less than precise. Why are rottweilers not to be included in the prohibited category? They are often advertised as having an aggressive temperament, and in the past they have been responsible for vicious attacks. One was responsible for an attack on two police officers only yesterday.

Finally, the Home Secretary knows that virtually all authorities on the care and control of dogs insist that protection and prohibition cannot work successfully without the introduction of a national registration scheme. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Such a scheme would be good for the welfare of dogs as well as for the protection of human beings. It would reduce the number of dogs obtained casually and callously abandoned within a few days. It would enable the Government effectively to enforce their other proposals. Why does the Home Secretary object so much to the idea? He was a great enthusiast for a register of people so as to implement the poll tax; why should we not have a register of dogs to protect the welfare of animals and the safety of citizens?

Mr. Baker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the broad thrust of what I have said about our proposals to deal with fighting dogs. I understand that he believes in and supports our proposal to prohibit not only import but ownership. I welcome that.

I welcome, too, the right hon. Gentleman's support on other matters relating to general legislation on dogs, and I should make it clear that I intend the Bill to make it a criminal offence, with a severe penalty, to have a dog dangerously out of control in a public place. That would apply to all breeds. I also hope that the Bill will clear up the definition of the word "control" and allow the courts specifically to require muzzling of certain dogs in some circumstances. That can be effectively policed. I hope that we can agree on those matters, too.

The right hon. Gentleman specifically asked about compulsory insurance. I have some sympathy with the idea, and I understand that many household insurance policies cover injuries caused by owners' dogs. However, measures relating to insurance may be rather more complicated than the other measures, and may not be ready in time for the Bill, which I hope to introduce shortly after Whitsun. I do not rule out the idea for further legislation.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether rottweilers should be included. In defining the group of dangerous dogs bred to fight and kill, I sought to draw a clear distinction between such dogs and other dogs. Rottweilers are not bred to fight and kill. Of course, I discussed the matter with the Kennel Club, the RSPCA and the veterinary associations yesterday. They said that there was a clear distinction between dogs bred over decades, or in some cases centuries, to fight and kill, and other pedigree dogs.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman argued again for registration, and I believe that a scheme will be in the Labour manifesto when the election comes. I do not believe that a general registration scheme would have had any effect on the dreadful incident last weekend. If that dog had been registered for £5 and had had a computer number on its collar, it would not have been prevented from attacking that little girl. Moreover, the argument for a registration scheme is that it would identify the owner with the dog. In all the recent incidents, the identification of the owner has not been the problem. The owners have been known in each case.

I am glad that I shall have the support of the right hon. Member and the Labour party on much of the legislation, although I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman on his last point.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw to the attention of the House the fact that there are 27 groups of amendments to be debated on the subsequent Bill and that there is an order after that. I shall allow questions on this matter to continue until 5.15 pm. I ask those hon. Members who are called to be brief because it will enable as many hon. Members as possible to be included.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): While expressing our sympathy to the victims of these appalling attacks and welcoming the Government's proposed ban on two species of fighter dogs, does not the Home Secretary recognise that, in proposing his Bill in such vague and uncertain terms, he betrays the Government's unwillingness to tackle the problem of dangerous dogs at root? He has not even made it plain that, in respect of the two breeds to be banned, he is prepared to take the advice of those who say that neutering would be adequate.

Why has the Home Secretary set his face against measures more comprehensive than those which will apply to the two breeds? Of the 465 cases of serious dog attacks in the metropolis of London in the past year, only 111 were by American pit bull terriers. The Home Secretary may believe that it is adequate to tackle a quarter of the problem, but many people in Britain will feel that the Government are falling sadly short.

Mr. Baker: The measures that I have announced represent a comprehensive package affecting all breeds of dogs. The measures on dogs which are out of control in a

[Mr. Baker]

public place and on control orders involving muzzling of specific dogs have the strong support of the Kennel Club and the RSPCA.

The hon. Gentleman asked why I did not take the advice that the specified families of dangerous dogs should simply be neutered. I have discussed the matter with the various interests. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that, if dogs can be made safe by neutering, I shall be prepared to consider it. However, my advice is that a neutered dog can be just as vicious.

The important point to appreciate about pit bull terriers and other cross-breeds is that they are completely unpredictable. That marks them out from other dogs. They can be friendly and docile one minute and complete killers the next. After the last three incidents, the owners said, "Our dog could not possibly have done that. It was friendly." I shall, of course, consider neutering, but I would have to be satisfied that it would secure safety.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the words of Mr. Roger Mugford, one of the most highly regarded animal psychologists in Britain and a writer on dogs. He said:

"All pit bulls go bad—it is just a countdown from when they are 12 months old."

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): My right hon. Friend will be aware of a tragic case in my constituency last year. When the case ultimately came to court, the magistrate did not order the destruction of the dog, even though the hospital had to place 100 stitches in a young girl's face and upper body. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, in the legislation and in his discussions with the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, magistrates are given strict and clear guidelines that dogs should be destroyed in such tragic cases?

Mr. Baker: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern about that incident. He has seen me about it. It would be wrong for me as Home Secretary or, I suspect, for the Lord Chancellor to comment on the sentence passed by a court. However, I am sure that the fact that he has mentioned it in the House will be noticed by many people.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement this afternoon, especially as two of the items in it were clearly addressed in early-day motion 840, which I tabled before the three tragic accidents last weekend. May I go further with the Home Secretary and reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said about a dog registration scheme? I shall certainly support today's announcement when it is translated into a Bill. However, it does not go nearly far enough. It does not address other problems with dogs in society, which the Home Secretary must tackle.

We need a comprehensive Dogs Act and a neutering programme, we must stop puppy farming and we must engage in an exercise to promote responsible dog ownership. That can be done only through a dog registration scheme. Only the fossilised remains who run the Kennel Club are opposed to such a scheme. Every other organisation in the land which has the welfare of animals and especially dogs at heart is in favour of a scheme. We shall have a scheme in Britain. If the Home Secretary is not forced by the political consequences of the dithering that has taken place to introduce a scheme before the general election, we shall introduce one after it.

Mr. Baker: I will say to the hon. Gentleman what I said to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. I do not believe that, if a registration scheme had been in operation, it would have had any effect on the recent incidents. Many of the owners of these breeds of dog would pay scant regard to registration. I must be frank with the House on that. When I talk to police forces about some of the people who own such dogs, they tell me that such people would not register. I appreciate that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook would try to enforce this scheme, but I remind him that, in the Republic of Ireland, where there is a dog registration scheme, in spite of attempts to enforce it, the authorities have managed to register only a third of dogs so far.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today. He may not be aware of a recent case in my constituency in Yardley Wood, in which a young girl was severely attacked by the family pet, which was not one of the dangerous breeds that he has specified. The attack happened while the dog was being fed. Therefore, I welcome the emphasis that my right hon. Friend has placed on responsible ownership. I hope that he will do all that he can further to promote responsible ownership of dogs.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. Fortunately, the great majority of dog owners are responsible. One can never exclude the possibilities of incidents in the home with any sort of dog. One only hopes that the dog has been trained by the owner to ensure that incidents do not take place.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the Home Secretary accept that his announcement is welcome but belated? If it were not for Rucksana Khan's tragic accident, the Government would not have taken action, despite a long list of similar accidents. Why does not the Home Secretary take immediate action to add such breeds as rottweilers and dobermans, which are also responsible for serious accidents, to the schedule of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976? That would immediately give powers to local authorities to license owners, inspect premises and ensure that proper standards are maintained, bearing in mind public safety.

Why does not the Home Secretary ensure that the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and the provisions of the Animal Health Act 1981 on muzzling are enforced as a matter of urgency, rather than wait for the legislation to come to the House, when a dozen more accidents might take place in the meantime?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has not studied it in enough detail. If he had studied the Act a little more carefully, he would have discovered that canus familiaris is specifically excluded from the Act. Therefore, I could not designate certain dogs. That is the reason why we are introducing a measure to identify a group of dogs. We cannot call them a breed. They are a species of dogs and a series of cross-breeds that have to be defined as carefully as we can to ensure that we cover them properly and make sure that the courts will be able to take action against them. One thing that is agreed between the RSPCA, the Kennel Club, the British Veterinary Association and

ourselves is that we want those types of dogs to be removed from our society permanently. They made that very clear to me yesterday. What we are examining is the way in which that can be done.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My right hon. Friend will have heard the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) criticise the Government earlier this afternoon for not introducing a Bill next week. Those of us on this side of the House who are members of the all-party animal welfare group are heartily relieved that my right hon. Friend is not adopting a populist or knee-jerk reaction. We are very grateful for the level of consultation that has taken place so far. May we hope that that consultation will continue, that the level of flexibility that has already been shown will continue and that my right hon. Friend will be open to suggestions before the Bill is brought before the House?

Mr. Baker: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to consult the various dog interests. I had useful and interesting meetings with them yesterday. As I have already said, there is an identity of interest. It was clear that the RSPCA, the Kennel Club and the British Veterinary Association want to see the elimination of these dogs from our country. They do not want them. It is a question of how we achieve that. They do not want them because these dogs are unpredictable. They can be very gentle one moment and killers the next. We cannot judge their behaviour in future by their behaviour in the past. We have made it very clear that we want to achieve the same objective.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): As a Bolton girl was involved in one of these incidents, I join those hon. Members who have expressed sympathy for the relatives and for all those who have been injured in these attacks. How does the Minister propose to deal with cross-breeding? Does he accept that, although we would agree to the putting down of animals, it ought to be a measure of last resort?

How does the Minister propose quickly to make this a criminal offence so that people have easy redress? It is bad dog owners who are responsible. We can put down the dogs but not the owners. If the Minister does not intend to have dog registration, does he accept that people who own potentially dangerous dogs that are not on his list should register them at the police station, in the same way as lethal weapons are registered?

Mr. Baker: By identifying these dogs and putting them into this category, one would be eliminating these types of dog. Those who favour neutering will realise that that is the end of the species; if the dogs are all neutered there can be no future puppies. I have already said that I will examine all this, but it would inevitably lead to a large number of dogs being put down. I must ask the House to remember how vicious and deadly these dogs can be. They are trained to fight and to kill. The pit bull terrier has a pressure in its head of 1,000 lb per square inch. It can pull several weights weighing several thousand pounds. They are trained to do that by chasing live cats that are then fed to them.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Will my right hon. Friend accept that he moved with commendable speed—I must confess almost electric, in Home Office terms, in being able to do so quite so quickly? Will he advise on whether or not the problem about bringing an owner to prosecution is affected by the fact that the dog itself has been destroyed? I understand that, if the dog is destroyed, no proceedings can be brought against the owner. Can that be put right?

Mr. Baker: If a dog is destroyed under the changes that we propose to make, and if the owner is found to have been guilty of having it dangerously out of control in a public place, proceedings will be taken against the owner. It is always possible, of course, for civil actions to be brought against owners, if negligence can be proved.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Does the Home Secretary realise that, although he has named breeds of dog, his real problem is not breeds of dog but types of dog that are bred with the blood lust in them to kill? How will he deal with that problem if he has to go to the court with each individual dog to get that dog muzzled? Surely the only sensible way to deal with the problem is to have a licensing authority that has the power either to grant or to deny a licence to keep a particular dog. Such a licence should not be granted for any dog unless the owner also has insurance against the damage that the dog might cause.

Mr. Baker: As I said, we are dealing with a particular group of dangerous fighting dogs. It is not a question of licensing them and letting them go on. The dog interests in the country clearly want these types of dog to be removed from our society. That is the purpose and the intention. The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point about definition. All dogs are of the same species. It is not possible to determine the type of dog by a method such as DNA fingerprinting. The existence of pedigree allows us to distinguish certain breeds, but the cross-breeds are very difficult to define scientifically or legally.

I have consulted experts about the definition. We plan to specify in the ban the type of dog commonly known as the pit bull terrier and the Japanese tosa, together with other dogs that appear to have been bred for fighting. I believe that these definitions can be made to stand up. We shall also take powers in the Bill to ensure that they can be tightened up should scientific knowledge in this area change and should it become easier to define dogs.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): As a former breeder and show judge of great Danes—*[Interruption.]* I know that we all look like our pets, but do not be rude to me—and also as a former boarding kennel owner, may I say that the vast majority of the big breeds have lovely natures? It is only a tiny minority that are bred by irresponsible breeders. Bona fide breeders will not use bad temperament in their breeds to produce puppies. I am sure that the Home Secretary has heard that from the Kennel Club.

In the case of the pit bull terrier, we are talking about exterminating the complete breed. Whether we call it a breed or a species, we have a problem. Some of the pit bull terriers will be used to produce half-breeds and three-quarter-breeds. It will take an expert to decide whether it is a pit bull terrier. Notwithstanding that fact, I honestly feel that, because some of those dogs are real pets and have been with their families for many years, we ought to give their owners a reasonable time to find homes for them in countries where it is not illegal to have them. That would be a humane approach. We should not give them too long, but they ought to be given long enough, if we are to be humane.

Mr. Baker: I had not appreciated that my hon. Friend was a big breeder. */Laughter./* I said "breeder". I have some sympathy with his point. If some of these dogs have been imported and the countries from which they came are prepared to take them back, a reasonable time should be allowed. However, most other countries in the world are introducing legislation that is very similar to what we are doing in the United Kingdom about these dogs.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I remind the Home Secretary that one attack every third day in the London area alone would have been avoided if only the Home Office had responded to an early-day motion tabled by 50 of us on 1 May 1990 warning of the nature of just these animals and the need to ban them.

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman more precisely about compensation? That is crucial. This breed of dog is possessed all too often by people of an irresponsible disposition. There are over 10,000 of these dogs. Does the Home Secretary recognise the danger that, if just 10 per cent. of them were to decide to abandon their dogs instead of destroying them, we should have 1,000 of these vicious dogs loose on our streets? Therefore, we need to know more about compensation, which will cost about £5 million. Will the Government pay that, or will it be paid by the councils?

Mr. Baker: On the question of owners abandoning their dogs, that would be an act of criminal irresponsibility, and I am therefore making it a criminal offence to permit a banned dog to stray. Those who act in that way would risk going to prison and would thoroughly deserve it. We are certainly considering a compensation scheme and will possibly allow some time for owners who wish to bring forward their dogs in that period to receive it.

Yesterday, I asked the RSPCA what it thought about the matter. It favours a compensation scheme, and when I asked about the level of compensation the RSPCA thought that for one of these fighting dogs with the fighting value taken out compensation should be about £20 to £25.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): My right hon. Friend's statement will be welcomed by the nation. Does he accept that it must not be used as the first step in a vendetta against dogs by dog haters inside and outside the House? Dr. Roger Mugford, to whom my right hon. Friend referred, and who is a distinguished dog psychologist, is, like me, a member of the national advisory panel Pro-dogs and believes that a dog registration scheme would not work. It is utterly irresponsible for some people to pretend that such a scheme is a magic panacea for dealing with all the problems. It is no solution to the problem of dangerous dogs.

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. Friend for his support, and agree entirely with his comments. Those with the greatest enthusiasm for a dog registration scheme have great difficulty in arguing that it would have affected the events of the past few weeks. I do not think that it would have affected them and such a scheme would be exceedingly difficult to enforce.

I assure my hon. Friend that our proposed measure is not anti-dog. Many dogs in our country give great pleasure and comfort to their owners, and their owners are responsible. We are dealing with a particularly difficult type of dog that has been bred specifically to kill and to fight. Fighting in private is illegal here, although it is not illegal in some parts of the world. Our Bill is directed against such practices, and at the same time it will impose some general obligations with which the responsible dog owner would have no difficulty in complying.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have another 14 minutes on the statement. I hope to call most hon. Members who have been rising. I hope that they will be brief and will not repeat questions that have already been asked.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman call for a report from Lothian police on the case of the pit bull dog that has been terrorising the Boghall housing estate in Bathgate? What is the scientific evidence to which he referred about the lust for blood and the very real dangers that girls face at obvious times?

Mr. Baker: I was not aware of the incident, and I shall certainly ask for a report. If the hon. Gentleman has any information about it, I would be glad to see it.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. Inevitably, there will be a lapse of time between the Bill's introduction and the implementation of its parts. Many people want to protect themselves against dangerous dogs. Has his Department carried out any evaluation of electronic hand-held devices which repel dogs? Such devices are widely available and are being promoted by mail order businesses. It is important that people who buy such devices know that they afford some protection and are not just completely useless toys.

Mr. Baker: We have not carried out any evaluation of these devices, but I am aware of them and shall certainly have them examined. I suspect that that is not really the ultimate answer to what we are dealing with. The ultimate answer has to be more responsible dog owners and the elimination of dangerous fighting dogs.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Home Secretary recall that, over the past two and a half years I, in common with some of my hon. Friends, have warned him in an early-day motion as well as in correspondence of the neigbourhood threat posed by pit bull terriers, and invited him to compel their owners to register them with the local police? It is evident to the entire House that he has been most reluctant to move in this matter. Now he is rushing towards a conclusion.

Although we accept much of what the right hon. Gentleman has said, some of us are entitled to doubt his judgment. He might get it wrong again. Is he justified in risking penalising the good, responsible owner? Is there no other way to deal with the breed? The right hon. Gentleman speaks with all the zeal of the convert, but what about alternative measures such as securing the dogs in a compound and muzzling them when they take exercise and, of course, registering them? Will he invite the neighbourhood watch schemes to incorporate in their terms of reference the reporting of such threats that arise in their areas?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that registering dogs would have effectively stopped the savage attacks in Lincolnshire, when two pit bull terriers in a

compound surrounded by a fence about 8ft high and a concrete floor jumped out of it, savaged a man, and destroyed his face. I would be happy to show the hon. Gentleman pictures of that man's face. It does not exist.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): When it comes to the method of removing the menace of the 5,000 or 10,0000 pit bull terriers in this country, will my right hon. Friend be careful about the argument that a programme of neutering would do the job? Does not the American record show that some of the 34 deaths and many hundreds of attacks in that country have been caused by pit bull terriers that had been neutered? Since that is the case, is there any alternative to a programme of humane extermination?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend may prove to be right. I said that I would be prepared to look into this matter. Neutering a dog does not necessarily render it less savage; it could still savage people or other dogs. My hon. Friend proffers wise counsel. Many people would like to believe that neutering is the solution and that neutered dogs would be able to live out their natural lives. They would have to be muzzled and kept in compounds with fences that are even higher than 8ft. Such controls and conditions could be introduced, but it would be a matter for owners whether to comply with them.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Why will not the Home Secretary accept that public concern is not confined to these two breeds? Public concern is about the irresponsible owner who keeps potentially vicious breeds, such as rottweilers and dobermans, not as family pets or companions but as potential offensive weapons. Such people can be seen every day swaggering up and down the streets of our inner cities. Such irresponsible ownership cannot be tackled without dog registration. How long will the Government set their face against public opinion in this matter?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Lady speaks of the problem of irresponsible owners, but they are the very last people to register a dog. I do not agree with her general condemnation of certain dogs. The dogs that she mentioned are not trained to fight and kill.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, may I remind him how much the House dislikes retrospective legislation? We shall look most carefully at the Bill's provisions for exemptions. Will he ensure that any exemptions are coupled with adequate safeguards, such as muzzling and proper insurance? If he wants to know the sort of dog to which I refer, he has only to go to St. Stephen's entrance now and meet Mrs. Juliet Glass, who is there with three-year-old Holly, an American pit bull terrier. Holly has been spayed and my right hon. Friend and any other hon. Member who makes Holly's acquaintance will confirm that it would not hurt a flea, never mind a human being.

Mr. Baker: The three owners of the dogs which recently committed these appalling attacks all said that the dogs were very quiet, friendly and peaceful and that people could stroke them and play with them. The characteristic of these cross-breeds is their unpredictability. They can change very quickly, and when they decide to attack, the jaws cannot be prised open. They go on until they kill. They can be muzzled in a public place, but the second of the incidents happened when grandparents were with their granddaughter. It is unreasonable to think that a dog can be muzzled throughout its life.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Home Secretary referred to different degrees of seriousness in attacks involving American pit bull terriers. I remind him that my constituent, Kelly Lynch, was killed in a savage attack by two rottweilers more than two years ago. Her family and friends will not be convinced that the right hon. Gentleman's statement shows that the Government have acted urgently or adequately.

Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that, without the dog registration scheme, he cannot begin to know the true levels of ownership of dangerous dogs? Without an adequate licence fee, the resources will not be available to establish a national network of effective dog warden schemes. Without those two basic building blocks, the whole edifice of dog control that he has announced will be built on sand and will not survive.

Mr. Baker: I have commented on our views about the registration scheme, but I continue to be unpersuaded that it would have a significant effect. On the question of rottweilers, as I said, the RSPCA and the Kennel Club, both of which support a ban on the ownership of pit bulls, would not support a ban on rottweilers, which are a recognised breed of dog. I am not convinced that rottweilers fall into the same category of unpredictable viciousness as pit bull terriers.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): As with dangerous weapons when carried in a public place, we have, in the public interest, reversed the presumption of innocence. Could we not use the same approach to deal with what will inevitably be the grey area of defining a pit bull terrier? The last thing that we want is for a smart alec lawyer to drive a coach and horses through much-needed legislation the first time that it comes to court.

Mr. Baker: I take my hon. Friend's comment, and I think that he makes a good point. If there is a dispute about whether a dog is of a banned type, the dog owner will have an opportunity to prove that the dog is not a pit bull, a tosa or another banned type by producing a certificate from two veterinary surgeons. That is an important safeguard, but in cases of doubt, the onus will be on the owner to prove that his dog should not be banned.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Many of my constituents will be extremely disappointed that the Minister is again setting his face against a dog registration scheme, which is seen as the sine qua non of the control of many aspects of dogs' behaviour. Will he clarify how today's statement relates to Scotland? It is most unusual for the Home Secretary to give a statement that covers Scotland. Indeed, I understand from a note that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland who has had to leave the Front Bench that the legislation will be amended under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

As the Home Secretary is the only Minister to make a statement today, can he say whether, if there will be separate legislation for Scotland, it will be open to the Committee that deals with it to suggest separate proposals relevant to the Scottish experience as related by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)? In Scotland, no more than a quarter of the deeply worrying incidents that take place would relate to the species covered by the announcement today. It must go wider, and I should like the Home Secretary's assurance that, in Scottish terms, it can go wider.

Mr. Baker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has agreed that the legislation should extend to Scotland which shares much of its legislation for controlling dogs with England and Wales.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): With regard to third party insurance, my right hon. Friend might be reassured to know that most people who have comprehensive house insurance, whether or not they have a dog, will find that third party insurance for a dog's actions is already included so that there is no need to have an additional policy. My right hon. Friend is already undertaking consultation, but will he also consult the National Canine Defence League, of which I am a council member and which has a valid point to make about people, dogs and breeds, so that he has a complete consultation procedure with all those who take an interest in the welfare of dogs and in their continuation?

Mr. Baker: On the latter point, I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. On insurance, it is perfectly true that some insurance policies—but by no means all—cover damage caused by dogs. However, very few insurance companies will cover the insurance of fighting breeds and, indeed, specifically refuse to do so. The companies have no difficulty in defining a fighting breed to justify their refusal of insurance.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Does the Home Secretary recall that after disclosures in the *South London Press* I put down a motion asking for an import ban on tosa dogs? At the time, I was advised that the powers to ban the import of those dogs did not exist. If the Home Secretary is satisfied that he has those powers, which he exercised from midnight, what exactly are they? If he is not certain about them, will he ensure that the law is amended so that he has the power to ban the import of dogs on the basis of breed and characteristics?

Mr. Baker: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the powers do exist under the Department of Trade and Industry's legislation and they were exercised last night. The difficulty has been to define the type of dog. It is easier to define a pedigree dog than to define a cross-breed. We now believe that we have a set of definitions which will stand up to scrutiny. It is important that we act—and I shall have the powers to do so—to ensure that new types of dogs can be added to the banned list.

I understand that there is only one tosa dog in the country, so we can take action now rather than 10 years on, when there would be debates about trying to eliminate a large number of dogs. Indeed, if we had taken the appropriate action with the American pit bull terriers in 1976, we should not be dealing with this problem today. I gather that at least three other breeds are being trained to fight and kill and we must ensure that they do not come to this country. As soon as we know and can define them, we can put them on the banned import list.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Having had the doubtful pleasure of being bitten by a rottweiler——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Did the dog die?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: No, the dog lived too.

There is a growing problem with guard dogs, of which rottweilers and dobermans are the well-known breeds. Although we talk about the savage injuries caused by the two dreadful breeds of fighting dogs, nearly all the injuries are caused by rottweilers and dobermans. The interbreeding of those dogs is a time bomb which is just about coming home. Many young people are now growing up fearful of big dogs. Unless we have a way to control the big breeds in public so that they are at least muzzled or controlled by their owners, a generation of young people will miss the great joy and pleasure of owning dogs which is experienced by many hon. Members.

Mr. Baker: The size of a dog does not necessarily have anything to do with its viciousness. Some large dogs are completely safe, such as the St. Bernard and the Irish wolfhound, which was once trained for hunting wolves but which has been bred over the centuries not to be a savage dog. I do not want to give the impression that a large dog is necessarily more dangerous and vicious than a small one. We had considered a definition of the size and weight of dogs, but it does not apply—one must examine the characteristics of a breed.

Mr. Hattersley: May I urge the Home Secretary to understand that he has been questioned about two different dimensions of the problem? The first is the specified breeds, and I believe that almost the entire House will support him in their banning and eventual extinction. The second dimension deals with attacks by dogs that are not the specified breeds. A dog's motives are hardly important—whether it was bred to fight is no consolation to the person who may be savagely and desperately attacked by a dog that was purchased for another purpose.

It is because of our concern to limit attacks by other dogs that we want to see a number of proposals to make the owners more responsible. The programme to make owners more responsible has at its heart a national dog register. There is widespread support for such a register. This is not an appropriate matter for party controversy —there is no ideology in the issue of a dog register. When the scheme comes before the House—as it will—will there be a free vote?

Mr. Baker: It is not for me to determine such matters, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman appreciates. I have made my views on dog registration known. I do not believe that it is the panacea that Opposition Members deeply believe it to be. However, I know that the right hon. Gentleman has sought to be helpful, and I appreciate that. I am grateful for his support of the proposals to deal with the dangerous breeds. As I said, I shall introduce wider measures to make it a criminal offence to have a dog dangerously out of control in a public place and measures to give court powers to be more specific in the control orders on dogs, which will extend to all breeds. I am anxious to put that package on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

Health Care of Prisoners

5.20 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make new provision for the health care of prisoners in England and Wales; and for connected purposes.

The main purpose of the Bill is to transfer the function of the health care of prisoners from the prison medical service to the national health service.

The question of medical care in prisons is not new to the House. Statutory medical presence in prisons dates back to 1774 when the Health of Prisoners Act was passed empowering justices of the peace to intervene in the administration of prisons in order to ensure the maintenance of health standards within them. As a result of that Act, justices could order the scraping and whitewashing of walls and ensure the provision of sick rooms, ventilation and regular washing and cleaning facilities. In addition, they were allowed to appoint an experienced surgeon or an apothecary, paying them from the rates, whose duty was to report on the health of those in prison.

In the 19th century, the House frequently debated deaths in prisons. In July 1840, *The Lancet* launched an assault on the reliability of the official figures for deaths in prisons. It commented:

"Health is impaired and life is shortened by imprisonment."

Since I was elected to the House in 1987, I have had to ask questions about seven suicides in Armley prison in my constituency. Six of those were committed by unconvicted youngsters held on remand. The issue is not confined to Armley prison by any means. With a national prison population of about 50,000 people, the United Kingdom has the largest number of prisoners per 100,000 of the population of any western European country. As a result of the Government's building expansion programme, the capacity will be increased to hold 80,000 prisoners.

In recent years, suicides in prisons have increased, especially among remand prisoners. Since 1987, the number of suicides has doubled each year. Last year, 51 prisoners died by their own hands and 12 have died in the first quarter of this year. There have been 13 "lack of care" verdicts returned on prison suicides by coroners' courts in the last four years.

In May 1989, the new suicide prevention guidelines were issued by the Home Office and were welcomed, but they need to be backed up by staffing and resources. Recently the British Medical Association focused on the prison medical service and described it as

"Unable to provide the necessary care of prisoners in general and particularly those prisoners on remand."

In December 1989 Mr. Justice Pills, ruling on the suicide of Paul Worrell in Brixton prison in 1982, made it clear that the prison medical service has no duty to provide prisoners with the same standard of care as that provided by the national health service. The Home Office's scrutiny of the prison medical service published last October recommended closer alignment with the NHS, but encouraged the prison medical service to call upon clinical services from national health service authorities.

At present, three types of doctor are involved in the prison medical service: the full-time prison medical officer employed by the Home Office, part-time visiting general practitioners and visiting specialists. There are 110 prison medical officers who are backed up by 1,069 uniformed prison hospital officers, also employed in the dual function as Home Office prison staff. Of those, only 171—16 per cent.—have even basic nursing qualifications and, although their training was extended from 13 weeks to 24 weeks in 1983, the Prison Officers Association has described it as

"little more than an extended first-aid course".

The 1989 report of the chief inspector of prisons for the very first time devoted a full chapter to medical services. It drew attention to a catalogue of practices which it described as

"well below the accepted standard and must not be allowed to continue."

The report drew attention to diagnostic testing, X-rays not properly taken, badly maintained equipment, inability to read the X-ray films, failure to carry out routine blood and urine tests, prescription of out-of-date drugs, misprescription and even cases of jaundice and diabetes not being properly diagnosed and treated. The chief inspector's report also highlighted the shortage of prison hospital officers, who are particularly overstreteched at night time which is the crisis time for suicides.

The prison medical service is structurally accountable to the prison service, but, because there is not a separation of function and responsibility between disciplinary control and medical care in prisons, the result is a lack of trained staff and training opportunities, recruitment problems, lack of accountability and strained loyalties, all of which must affect the quality of health care.

I have received supportive and confidential letters from doctors who are aware of the difficulties caused by their accountability to the Home Office. My Bill would replace the facilities of the prison medical service with NHS provision, it would establish an independent medical council and ensure that free health care of an equal standard to that of the general public is available to prisoners as a basic right. My Bill is a common sense practical measure with widespread professional support within and without the prison service and in the probation and medical services. It is also supported by statutory and voluntary bodies such as the National Association of Probation Officers and Inquest. I hope that it will receive the wholehearted support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Battle, Mr. Peter Archer, Mr. Chris Smith, Sir Charles Irving, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Bruce Grocott, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. Gerald Bermingham and Mrs. Audrey Wise.

Health Care of Prisoners

Mr. John Battle accordingly presented a Bill to make new provision for the health care of prisoners in England and Wales; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 June and to be printed. [Bill 16[illegible]

Orders of the Day

New Roads and Street Works Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Ordered,

That the New Roads and Street Works Bill *[Lords]*, as amended, be considered in the following order: new Clauses relating to Part I; new Schedules relating to Part I; Amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 5, Schedule 1, Clause 6, Schedule 2, Clauses 7 to 24; new Clauses relating to Part II; new Schedules relating to Part II; Amendments relating to Clauses 25 to 43; new Clauses relating to Part III; new Schedules relating to Part III; Amendments relating to Clauses 44 to 46, Schedule 3, Clauses 47 to 59, Schedule 4, Clauses 60 to 98, Schedule 5, Clauses 99 to 102; new Clauses relating to Part IV; new Schedules relating to Part IV; Amendments relating to Clauses 103 to 118, Schedule 6, Clauses 119 to 157, Schedule 7, Clauses 158 to 161; Other new Clauses; Other new Schedules; Amendments relating to Clauses 162 to 164, Schedules 8 and 9, Clauses 165 to 167. —*[Mr. Freeman.]*

New Clause 2

ANNUAL REPORT ON CONCESSION AGREEMENTS AND TOLL ORDERS

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall in respect of each calendar year lay before Parliament a report—

(a) stating the number of concession agreements entered into by him during that year,

(b) stating the number of new roads opened to public use during that year for which he is the highway authority and which at the time of their opening were subject to a concession,

(c) listing the toll orders, and orders varying or revoking toll orders, made or confirmed by him in that year, and

(d) containing such information as appears to him to be appropriate with respect to the toll orders (whenever made) which are in force during that year or any part of it.

(2) The report shall be laid on or before 31st July in the following calendar year.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.26 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 27, 29, 30, Government new clause 9—*Report on toll roads and toll orders in Scotland*—and Government amendments Nos. 74 to 76.

Mr. Freeman: We start with what I hope is, as far as possible, a note of consensus. We have had sufficient time since the completion of the Committee stage to consult as widely as possible with local authorities; utilities; those interested in the preservation of the countryside, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England; and various cycling organisations. I hope that I have met most, if not all, of the legitimate concerns on which I promised the Committee to reflect.

I hope that the new clause and some of the others will not provoke much controversy. They may expose a fundamental difference of opinion on a number of issues, but on the narrow issue of how best to improve the Bill I hope that there will be at least a measure of agreement.

The new clause and the related Government amendments affecting England, Wales and Scotland extend the scope of the annual report which is required by clause 1. It is an annual report to Parliament which must be made before 31 July of the following year. The Government welcome the procedure because it is open and represents solid, if modest, progress on the size of the road programme. Nevertheless, it is positive progress.

The annual report already has to include the number of concession agreements entered into and the number of new roads that were opened to public use when the Secretary of State was the highway authority and that were subject to a concession.

New clause 2 and the related amendments fulfil a commitment that I gave in Committee and add another requirement—that the annual report should list the toll orders, the changes, variations, revocations and extensions of toll orders that have been confirmed during the year; and other relevant information. It will catch not only special roads for which the Secretary of State for Transport is responsible but local highway authorities. It is therefore broad in nature and presents no particular problem because the Government would be the confirming authority for toll orders relating to "local" roads—those within the purview of local highway authorities.

The provision will also catch public tolls, where toll orders relate to public bridges and where changes have been made. It will cover not only the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Transport but parallel provisions for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

When the annual reports are presented to Parliament, it will be clear that tolling is not a substitute but an addition to public sector provision, including the transport supplementary grant. I welcome openness in Government and proper reporting to Parliament, which is appropriate in this case. The provision will not cover those tolls that are directly regulated by private Acts of Parliament, or Acts arising from the hybrid Bill procedure, because there is already full provision for their reporting and public scrutiny.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): May I echo what the Minister said about the consensus that exists on the Bill and the way in which we have been able to co-operate with the Minister and his Department during its proceedings to date? We are grateful to him for undertaking to consult people between Committee and Report, and we are aware that much of that consultation has been fruitful. Many of the issues that we sought to press upon the Minister in Committee have now been conceded by him; we shall see, as we go through the debates tonight, that the Opposition agree with much of the Bill.

However, new clause 2 does not seem to contain precisely the measures that we sought. Will the Minister hear me out and see whether he can enlighten us further? Two changes have been made: information on toll orders is added to the list, and a reference is made to the inclusion of

"such information as appears to him to be appropriate with respect to the toll orders".

Two of our concerns in Committee about clause 1(6) are outstanding. The Committee considered an

Opposition amendment which would have added three new topics to the contents list of the annual report; first, the number of competitions held and the number of bidders for each competition; secondly, whether the winners of a competition should be required to compensate the loser; thirdly, the number of occasions on which the Secretary of State had entered into joint agreements with bidders to undertake traffic and environmental studies. When we pressed the Minister on those points in Committee, he responded by giving an assurance that the issues listed would, where appropriate, be covered in the annual report.

The first issue that arises from the new clause is why, having decided to extend the list of items to be covered in the report, the Minister has not included any of the subjects considered by the Standing Committee. The second issue concerns the wording of new clause 2(d), which refers to information

"with respect to the toll orders."

The topics covered in the amendment considered in Standing Committee did not relate to a toll order. Indeed, the events referred to may take place a considerable time before a toll order is made for the concession road in question.

As the Minister has produced a catch-all phrase in respect of toll orders only, and not in respect of the wider issues on concession agreements referred to in Committee, will he explain how new clause 2 meets his assurance in Committee about how he would meet our objections and suggestions—with which he seems to concur—that the topics to which I referred would properly come within the annual report?

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): There was a great deal of agreement in Committee, and I hope that we shall have a speedy conclusion tonight on many of the subjects to be discussed.

On the annual report, the Minister said that toll orders would be confirmed during the course of the year. I assume that he means that the date the Secretary of State first received notification of a toll order would be the date on which we decided to place it in an annual report. If not, what timing does the Minister foresee for the reporting of a toll order to the general public? Where do the general public come into the matter? Does it then follow that, after the decision, the general public would have a public inquiry and other inquiries, which would then be included in the annual report?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): May I take this opportunity to deal specifically with new clause 9 and the issue that underlies it? It relates to part II and deals with the report on toll roads and toll orders in Scotland. It illustrates the off-hand way in which the Bill has been railroaded through. The new clause is of considerable importance to specific communities in Scotland, yet we do not have the courtesy of the presence, on the Government Front Bench or in the House, of a single Scottish Office Minister.

Virtually nobody else in the House knows or cares about this issue. I care very much, because it is about paving legislation for the construction of a high-toll private enterprise road bridge between the mainland and the Isle of Skye. That is the ideological toehold that the Government are obtaining for private enterprise construction and the imposition of high-toll bridges and roads in Scotland. It is a crime, albeit a victimless crime.

The people who will pay the price, for at least the next 20 years, for a measure that will be railroaded through tonight are those who live on that island and beyond. At present, they are wholly dependent on the ferry for access to the mainland and, in future—if the Government get their way—they will be at the mercy of a company called Miller Construction, which is about to be given a licence to build a bridge and to charge what it likes for the next 20 years to recoup that investment.

It would be a terrible wrong on a small community if, in the last month of this Parliament, the Government were to sign and seal a contract that would condemn the people of Skye for 20 years to bridge tolls 10 times more expensive than those anywhere else in the United Kingdom. That is the immediate prospect under the Bill.

In the past 20 years, over 140 large and small bridges have been built in the highlands and islands from public funds without the imposition of tolls on those who use them. They include such substantial structures as Ballachulish bridge, Kylescu bridge and Dornoch bridge. The programme, which was initiated when the construction of the Ballachulish bridge in the late 1960s was agreed by a Labour Government, has been carried through since then on a consensual basis no matter which party was in power, on the basis of the shared belief that there was a public duty and social responsibility to improve communications within the highlands and islands of Scotland. It was always the understanding that, as it is the most ambitious of the projects, the Skye bridge would come at the end of that programme. It was always assumed that the Skye bridge would be an extension of the public highway network, but that is not now what is proposed.

Has the Minister the slightest clue what he is legislating for? Can he explain why, uniquely, those who visit Skye and points west of Skye, and those who cross to the mainland from them, should be penalised by tolls of between £4 and £5 per car per crossing—and that is just for starters? The answer to that question lies not in justice or any iota of concern for island communities, but in the hard face of ideology, in which the project is seen as the way of putting into play in Scotland the concept of high-toll private enterprise bridges.

Would the few hon. Members present tonight vote happily in favour of a measure that imposed such a dreadful burden of tolls on their communities for the next 20 years? If they would not have it done to their communities, why should they participate in allowing it to be done to the island of Skye? This part of the legislation is a disgrace. It condemns one community in Britain to a regime of tolls 10 times higher than those anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

The answer that will be given is that, at present, people are served by a ferry. However, around the coast of Britain, many communities were at some time served by ferries. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), who I am pleased to see has just joined us, recently opened a new causeway at Dornie, which is not far from the place that we are talking about. In the past, one had to cross at Dornie by ferry, but a bridge was erected and then a causeway was built. However, people do not have to continue to pay tolls of the same price as the former ferry charge.

When the bridge was built at Ballachulish, we did not consider what the tolls were 10 or 15 years ago when the bridge replaced the ferry, so that the same charge could be

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

applied to the bridge as once applied to the ferry. We do not do that at Kylescu or any of the other places, not just in Scotland but in Britain as a whole, which were once served by ferries and are now to be served by bridges. However, that is the fate that is to be uniquely visited on the people of Skye because of the introduction of the private enterprise element.

For at least 20 years, those people will have to pay tolls of between £4 and £5 per car, instead of enjoying the bridge as an extension of the public highway. The bridge should be an aid to the development of communities, which are peripheral in every sense and need improved communications to foster their economic prospects.

The legislation paves the way for the high-toll private enterprise regime which has been visited on the isle of Skye and on those who use the route at present and will do so in future. It is a disgrace which the Government would not dare to impose on a large community: they pick the weak.

5.45 pm

Mr. Freeman: I am used to the calmer proceedings in Committees dealing with English issues. I am not as used as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to a great deal of——

Mr. Wilson: Answer the questions.

Mr. Freeman: I shall address the points raised, but the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) expressed many intemperate views, and I shall deal with those issues first.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Scottish Office should have some responsibility for this matter. I do not necessarily agree with all that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) said, but he has made a valid point. New clause 9 is in the name of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the strictures apply specifically to Scotland, not to England and Wales. A Scottish Minister should answer the points raised by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North. That is a common-sense and fair constitutional point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister for Public Transport has risen to answer the debate, and he should be allowed to continue to so so.

Mr. Douglas: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Your answer did not apply to the point of order that I was making and I ask you to reflect on what I am saying. New clause 9 is a Scottish clause and a Scottish Minister is present. Although the Minister for Public Transport may be able to reply to the general clauses, the specific issue in new clause 9 has nothing to do with the departmental interests of the Secretary of State for Transport. Surely a Scottish Minister should answer the questions on Scottish issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The lead new clause is new clause 2. It is certainly true that new clause 9 is grouped with it, but we should allow the Minister for Public Transport to answer the debate.

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps I can be helpful. Although, with the agreement of the House, I should like to address some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will respond to points relating to the Skye bridge. I cannot speak on that issue and would not pretend to do so.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North said that the measure was being railroaded through. In my experience of Parliament, I cannot think of a Bill for which that remark would be more inappropriate than the one we are debating. I wish to put on record my strong feelings about that statement, which is not true. The hon. Gentleman should consult shadow Ministers on the subject.

In Committee, shadow Ministers made it plain that, if in government, they would not activate that part of the Bill to allow them to build toll roads. By implication, it was apparent that, if procedures had been started, they would be cancelled. They were perfectly consistent about that from the word go.

If the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North objects in principle to the building of a particular toll bridge or toll road, he must choose an alternative, of which there are three. He could increase the generality of the road programme, which would mean greater pressure on public resources and could involve higher taxation. He could cancel, or recommend cancellation of, other projects in Scotland because the Scottish Office is responsible for that vote. He would have to state that, in his judgment, a publicly built bridge should be given a higher priority than some other schemes which he, or a shadow Minister, would have to identify. His third option would be to accept that the bridge will not be built as quickly as it otherwise would be.

I shall now deal with the points raised by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock). New clause 2 states the statutory minimum, but when we publish an annual report we shall go considerably further than is required as a minmum; otherwise, the report will look a little bare and uninteresting. I should say to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) that, although the information will be retrospective—it has to be—all hon. Members would want the public to take an interest in the document. We want it to be not merely a set of arid tables but an informative document. It would not be hundreds of pages long, but it would go beyond the statutory minimum.

The hon. Member for Deptford raised three points relating to the number of competitions held, whether there was any scheme to compensate the losers, and joint research and studies between the relevant Government Departments and those competing for the concessions. Those are all perfectly valid points. The number of competitions held will probably relate directly to the number of concessions let. I am less persuaded on that point than on the other two, which are perfectly valid.

Although the hon. Member for Deptford knows the Government's position on compensation for losers—we are not in favour of it—at this point we are not ruling it out as a possibility in the future as an arrangement between the contractors. If that were to happen, I would regard it as public interest and public guidance to the construction industry, and doubtless that would be referred to.

Joint research between the Department and contractors is one way to avert some of the risks and therefore of advancing the cause of the toll road being built, because contractors might wish to share in common information

—for example, on soil surveys and traffic densities. I would wish to see that reported, to the extent that it is of public interest and is significant.

I hope that I have dealt with the matters raised by the hon. Member for Deptford and by the hon. Member for Southport. I know that the latter will have many other comments to make about the information available to the public and to the protection of the public during our proceedings. However, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland may wish to answer the questions about the Skye bridge.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I am glad to respond to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who I know feels very strongly indeed about this subject. He has written a strong article in the *Glasgow Herald*. In principle, he is against tolls and he has made that clear in the past. There is a great deal of support in Highland regional council for a bridge to Skye and for the Skye bridge project. The council voted overwhelmingly in favour of the project proceeding as a privately financed scheme.

I told the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North and many other people in Scotland that I would provide a free bridge if I were in a position to do so. I am not in that position and I do not believe that the Government will be in such a position for the foreseeable future. There is no prospect of that happening unless a major motorway project in the central belt of Scotland is cancelled. Frankly, we are not prepared to do that because of the needs of the lowlands of Scotland, where the bulk of the population lives.

As regards the Skye bridge and tolls, details of the bridge contract have yet to be finalised. As I said at Dornie —I am glad to repeat it today—tolls will be comparable with ferry fares. Obviously we shall keep in close touch with Highland regional council on the subject.

Environmental considerations have been taken fully into account, and we have bent over backwards to meet all the environmental concerns that have been suggested, and have had a large number of meetings on the subject.

I stress again that the bridge to Skye would bring with it enormous benefits for tourism, not only for Skye but onwards to the Western Isles. We have offered to cover the funding of the approach road—to the extent of £6 million —and of the trunk road from Kyle of Lochalsh to Uig, which are substantial contributions. Highland regional council rightly took that into account.

I believe that the islanders are overwhelmingly of the opinion that the bridge would raise their standard of living. The people whom I would describe as white settlers, who have come from elsewhere in Britain to live in Skye, may not take that view and may prefer no bridge, but the people who have lived on the island and have been directly concerned with the practicalities of life there are strongly in favour of a bridge. I have visited Skye almost every year for the past 20 years.

The bridge will bring substantial benefits to the local community. By using private finance, the community will be able to enjoy the advantages of a fixed link with the mainland much earlier than would otherwise be the case. A bridge might not be provided from public funding for 20 years or even longer without displacing other extremely worthwhile projects, which are already in the programme.

We expect to sign a concession agreement with the winning consortium in July or, at the latest, September. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North for giving me the opportunity to reply on that subject.

Mr. Douglas: That was an inadequate explanation of the Secretary of State's activities in relation to the new clause. One can argue that everything has an opportunity cost. The same arguments could have been applied to the building of the Beauly or the Dornoch firth bridges—neither of those has been subject to tolls—and it can be said that the only way to build the Skye bridge is if it is subject to tolls.

However, my argument is that we should be going the other way in Scotland. We should have a road-related tariff for ferries to the Western Isles and elsewhere. I argue forcibly for the social cost benefit of not having tolls on that bridge. Tolls will act as a restriction of economic and other activities. They would mean making a section of the population pay an additional charge, to which other sections are not subject. The Minister is making a poor argument at this stage. He says that the Secretary of State for Scotland will enter into an agreement for the commissioning of the private road bridge and will commit succeeding Governments. I do not know whether there will be a succeeding Labour Government, but let us assume that, for the sake of argument.

Ms. Ruddock: Of course there will.

Mr. Douglas: I am not necessarily opposed to that. I am willing to argue the case by way of illustration.

The Secretary of State will sign a contract with a private developer, and if any future Labour Government wanted to reverse that with a buy-out, the developer will be paid considerable compensation. There will be a clause in the agreement to compensate the private developer for the loss of tolls for 20 or 25 years. That should not be done at this stage in the life of a Parliament. The Secretary of State ought not to be allowed to enter into an agreement with a private developer and to commit a future Government to pay compensation for 20 or 25 years. They should desist and they should not enter into such an agreement.

Obviously, I am not negotiating for the Secretary of State, but it strikes me as extremely silly of him to do that; he should leave the contract more open. If a future Government wanted to abolish the toll, they should not find themselves in the onerous position of having to compensate the private developer because the Secretary of State for Scotland in a Tory Government had wanted to rush through a provision which is desirable—no one is disputing that fact—but which is contrary to what has been done with other road bridges in the highlands and islands.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) mentioned a considerable number of bridges, none of which has been subject to tolls. We await the opening of the Dornoch bridge in a few weeks' time. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will go up there and say how wonderful it is and how it will reduce journey times from Inverness to Thurso. However, there are no tolls on that bridge—it is a wonderful piece of economic development. Why should the bridge to Skye have tolls imposed on it when that bridge does not have tolls? There is no real logical or economic argument in terms of the

[Mr. Douglas]

development of the highlands and islands and the Western Isles. Although it is useful for the Under-Secretary to be here, it shows up the paucity of his arguments.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): The Minister for Public Transport said that essentially three options were available for the funding of bridges. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has told us that there are two options for the people of Skye: a toll bridge or no bridge at all. I want to ask the Under-Secretary of State a question that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), could not answer in Committee. Will such private funding supplement or be a substitute for public funding of roads? Will it make any difference to the public expenditure programmes available to local authorities in Scotland?

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are not in Committee. He has spoken once, and he would need the leave of the House to speak a second time.

6 pm

Mr. Wilson: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to return briefly to my argument, as the Minister did not arrive until I was some way into my speech. Without rehearsing the arguments again, I would like to pick him up on a couple of points. We both know the arguments very well, and I want to get rid of a couple of red herrings that he introduced.

First, the Minister said that the great majority of people wanted a bridge. There is no disagreement about that; but an even greater majority do not want a bridge with a toll of £4 or £5 a car every time they cross it. That point was made in a petition signed by 7,000 people, which the Minister chooses to disregard, along with other evidence.

Highland regional council is constantly called in aid. It was faced not with a choice, but with a dilemma. It had not three but two options—take it or leave it. It had to accept a high-toll bridge or, the Government threatened, there would be no bridge at all for at least 20 years. The crux of the matter is not the opinion of Highland regional council or the public, because they are at one. What they want, overwhelmingly, is a bridge without tolls.

I cannot allow the Minister to get away with the divisive argument about "white settlers". That is a term that I do not like or use. A small minority of people do not want a bridge, some have lived in Skye all their lives and some have not. Who gives a tuppenny toss about that? It is a divisive argument, which I am not prepared to get into. The majority want a bridge, and—whether they want a bridge or not—if there is to be one everyone wants it to be toll-free. That is the one option that the Government are not prepared to offer.

The community is being blackmailed: if it does not accept a bridge on that basis, it cannot have a bridge at all. That has not been said to any other community in Scotland. I do not blame the Minister, because I do not think that he believes in this proposal any more than I do. He is the stalking horse for nastier forces in the Scottish Office, on this and many other matters. He did not invent the idea of making the Skye bridge a toll bridge. He will not rub his hands with ideological satisfaction when Miller Construction, which is one of the largest contributors to Tory party funds in Scotland, receives the contract to build the bridge. He is not the architect of this project, but he should not soil his hands with it, especially in view of his past family connections with Skye.

People want a bridge, but not a high-toll bridge. They have been put in this dilemma because, unlike every other community that has been served by a bridge, they have not been given the option of a bridge as an extension of the public highway system.

If a Minister of equivalent status had gone around the highlands 20 years ago—such madness was not abroad then—he could have said to people in Ballachulish, west Sutherland and the east highlands who were crying out for bridges, "We know that it is a splendid idea, and we support the idea of building a bridge here, but the Government have no money. If you want a bridge, the only way is to pay through the nose for the next 20 years to some construction company." Fortunately, that degree of malevolence was not in the public spirit of the times, but it is now. That is why, uniquely, the people of Skye are being given Hobson's choice.

I ask the Minister not to carry out this proposal in advance of the general election. I say to him, "Don't tie the people of Skye and the Western Isles into this terrible imposition for the next 20 years without the moral or political authority or mandate to do so."

I remind the Minister that, unlike most of our time in political activism, the present climate means that we could travel the highlands and islands of Scotland from Muckle Flugga to Machrihanish and find many unpleasant impediments in our way, but we would not find a Tory Member of Parliament. Throughout the highlands and islands, the Tory party has shed its traditional support and has turned people against it by such nonsense, and by a lack of social concern for fragile communities. At one time, people were prepared to place some trust in one-world Tories—I am sorry, I mean one-nation Tories; "one-world Tories" would be a bit imaginative. The grandees once represented those areas in the Tory interest, but they no longer exist. People do not trust the Tory party because it continues to impose such experiments on fragile communities.

I urge the Minister—if he has any influence in the Scottish Office—to wait until after the general election. If by any mischance we are then still lumbered with a Tory Government, my arguments would fall. To tie up a community for 20 years in the dying days of a Parliament with no political mandate would, however, be scandalous beyond belief. The Minister would be held personally responsible for a very long time to come.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman seek the leave of the House to speak again?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All the hon. Members who have spoken have raised a number of points, to which I want to reply. First, the principle of the privately financed initiative is to ensure that more schemes can be constructed than would otherwise be possible. In reply to the point made by the hon. Member for Paisley, South, (Mr. McMaster), let me say that the purpose is to make public funds go as far as possible. It may be argued that the Skye bridge should be publicly funded, but it would not

then be additional. The Government have made it clear that there will be no scheme-by-scheme reduction in the public programme.

If the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is prepared to cancel a motorway project in central Scotland to provide a toll-free Skye bridge, it would be useful for the House to know which programme he would cancel. I do not believe that that would be acceptable.

I stress again that Highland regional council came out very strongly in favour of the bridge. Its press release, issued on 19 November 1990, said:

"Highland regional council convenor, Councillor Duncan McPherson, . . . warmly welcomed the progress being made on the . . . project and said he was sure the large majority of people of Skye would be delighted . . . that it should be ready by 1994."

Councillor McPherson is also vice-president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. He said:

"I am encouraged by the initial indication from the tender process that our expectations will be fulfilled for the people of Skye. From the displays, it is obvious the consortia have gone to a great deal of care and effort to provide exciting designs that are worthy of this setting."

It is one of the most beautiful in the world. He ended by saying:

"My Council wholeheartedly support the Skye bridge project."

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North was concerned about the level of tolls. That point was put to me when I went to the opening of Dornie. We shall keep it in mind, but I can tell the House that the tolls will be broadly comparable with ferry fares.

Mr. Douglas: The Under-Secretary knows that the contract for the bridge will reflect the toll charges.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Mr. Douglas: It would be an unusual contract if it did not. Is the Under-Secretary telling us that he will place a contract with Miller Construction that it will take without any idea of the charges that will have to be borne? If the charges are light, the payback period will be longer. The design has been accepted, so will he give us some idea of the tolls that are likely to be charged? What period of payback does he have in mind?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The next planning stage will be for Highland regional council to endorse the level and duration of tolls and the toll regime before we go ahead. Final details have not been worked out, but I stand by the general commitment that I have given that the tolls must be broadly comparable to ferry fares.

May I conclude with a point that is relevant to residents of the area? A study is being undertaken of whether a case can be made for a pedestrian ferry. We are taking that seriously in co-operation with Highland regional council as it is important for the islanders of Skye. I think that I have answered all the points that have been made.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF PROJECTS INVOLVING SPECIAL ROADS

'. In section 105A of the Highways Act 1980 (environmental assessment of certain highway projects), after subsection (2) (cases in which environmental statement must be published) insert—

"(2A) Any project for the construction or improvement of a special road which falls within Annex II to the Directive shall be treated as having such characteristics that it should be made subject to an environmental assessment in accordance with the Directive.".'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following:

New Clause

POLICY COMPLIANCE

'( ) (1) Before entering into a concession agreement a highway authority shall satisfy itself in accordance with this section that the special road provided for in the agreement is in accordance with national, regional and local environmental land use and transport policies.

(2) The requirements of subsection (1) above shall be satisfied if —

(a) in any case where the route of the special road has been specified by the authority, the authority has published a statement indicating how the road complies with the relevant policies;

(b) in any case where the need which the road is intended to meet has been identified by the authority, but the route has not been so identified by it —

(i) the authority has published a statement indicating how the meeting of that transport need through the construction of a road complies with the relevant policies, and

(ii) the authority has required the concessionaire to publish a statement indicating how his design for the road meets the need identified in the most effective way, and he has published such a statement;

or

(c) in any case where the road does not form part of the highway authority's plans or programme, it has required the concessionaire to publish a statement —

(i) indicating the transport need which the road is intended to meet;

(ii) explaining how the meeting of that need complies with the relevant policies; and

(iii) indicating how his design for the road meets the need identified in the most effective way, and he has published such a statement.'.

New Clause 4

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF PROJECTS INVOLVING SPECIAL ROADS (NO. 2)

'In section 105A of the Highways Act 1980 (environmental assessment of certain highways projects), after subsection (2) (cases in which environmental statement must be published) insert—

"(2A) Any project for the construction of or improvement of a special road which falls within Annex II of the Directive or is likely to have a significant effect on the environment shall

be treated as having such characteristics that it should be made subject to an environmental assessment in accordance with the Directive.".'.

New clause 5—*Environmental impact assessment*—

'Before entering into a concession agreement, a highway authority shall carry out and publish an environmental impact assessment of the proposed road which shall include the local effects as listed in the Manual of Environmental Assessment and in addition the following objectives—

(a) an assessment of land use changes which would occur if the proposed road is built;
(b) an environmental impact assessment of road construction and maintenance;
(c) an assessment of the existing means of alternative transport available to persons likely to undertake journeys for which the road is proposed;
(d) an assessment of the transport need which the road is designed to meet, and
(e) an assessment of the environmental, social and economic effect of providing alternative modes of transport for persons likely to undertake journeys if the proposed road is built.'.

New clause 6—*Duty of the Secretary of State regarding special roads, etc.*—

'For subsection 16(8) of the Highways Act 1980 there is substituted—

"Before making or confirming a scheme under this section, the Secretary of State shall give due consideration to—

(a) the requirements of local and national planning including the requirements of agriculture, and of
(b) in the case of a special road subject to a concession agreement under Part I of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, the environmental impact assessment carried out and published by the highway authority as required under that Act.".'.

Amendment No. 37, in page 2, line 15, clause 1, at end insert—

'(5A) It shall be the duty of the concessionaire in discharging any of its functions under this Act to so exercise its powers as to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological and physiographic features of special interest and the protection of sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historical or archaeological interest.'.

Government new clause 10—*Essential assessment of projects involving special roads in Scotland.*

Mr. Freeman: New clause 3 provides the requirement for environmental assessments on roads.

Since the Committee stage, I have had a chance to talk to the Council for the Protection of Rural England. I may not be able to satisfy it on several issues that it raised, but on one point I can do so and it is reflected in the new clause, which requires that every special toll road shall be subject to an environmental statement. European Community directive 85/337 makes provision for environmental assessments for all roads in annexe I, which are mainly motorways, and there is some leeway on roads in annexe II.

The new clause provides that all toll roads will be subject to environmental statements. Under the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 an environmental assessment must be made of local authority toll roads. To the extent that there is a problem, it is more in perception than in reality. The new clause makes it clear that there must be an environmental statement for all toll roads.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Fundamental opposition has been expressed to the Bill's provisions, such as those affecting the toll road to Skye. Leaving aside those disagreements, we must consider the substance of the Bill as we can do little to change its main provisions.

The Minister has not been able to meet all our concerns, but we are grateful that he has met many of them. We have made much ground since we began debating environmental assessments in Committee. New clause 3 is a considerable advance, but it does not meet all our concerns. None the less, we welcome it as, for the first time, it provides an explicit requirement for environmental assessments.

Existing procedures fail to tackle the fundamental need for environmental protection. The new clause ensures that is a private road falls under annexe II of the EC directive on projects involving special roads, an environmental assessment will no longer be discretionary but will be made compulsory. That is welcome as far as it goes, but we want the Minister to give an assurance that meets the provisions of new clause 4. Some private roads will still fall outside the directive's annexes, but all private and public roads should be subject to environmental assessment. We agree with the views of the Council for the Protection of Rural England that certain road improvements that have significant environmental impact could be exempt.

6.15 pm

There is tremendous resistance to environmental assessment, possibly from within the Department of Transport, with which a Labour Government would deal within a few days of taking office. There is some reluctance to believe that environmental assessment is good in its own right. It has been stated that—perhaps the Minister is aware of this—an environmental assessment may attract the objections of conservationists. We believe that, throughout the country, structure plans have been accompanied by honest and open debate. It is essential that any potential conflicts are identified and addressed in the planning stages rather than when it is too late. The concessionaire would be fully aware of the opportunities and constraints of any proposal for a toll road.

Full environmental assessment of new road schemes should take into account the need for a new road. Existing procedures do not provide an opportunity to question whether a road is necessary, which is considered when it is too late to do anything about it. Full environmental assessment of new roads should take into account their associated development effects and public accountability in the decision-making process.

It is important to recognise what has happened in the past few years, because we do not want a repeat of the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for the Environment, in which he described the M40 as a "corridor for growth", thereby back-tracking on firm promises given in 1984.

In a press release, Andrew Purkis, national director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, said that firm promises made in 1984 that the planning system would resist development pressure arising from construction of the M40 have been turned on their head. We want to ensure that the need for a road is taken into account and that the environmental assessment is made at an early stage.

We do not want roads to slip through the net of environmental protection, which is why we urge, at this late hour, the need for a fail-safe against the criteria set out in the departmental standard. We want a firm undertaking

from the Minister that the Government will extend their commitments to environmental assessment to cover all private roads. We should like an early reform of the environmental assessment procedures for all public and private road schemes.

The Government have already taken powers in the Planning and Compensation Bill, which has recently been considered in the House, that enable them to make regulations applying environmental assessments more rigorously to road proposals. If that Bill can reflect such concerns, why cannot the Secretary of State for Transport take them on board?

I put it to the Minister, who has been very reasonable throughout our discussions, that the Department of Transport is lagging behind other Government Departments in its commitment to environmental protection. I hope that we shall receive from him an assurance that he will fully review the whole issue of environmental assessment in respect of all roads. That would take us a little way along the route that we want to take.

It is clear that, at present, environmental assessment is made available too late to ensure that environmental matters are material considerations in the selection of a private road scheme. The whole procedure is flawed. The current departmental standard should be reviewed. We should like from the Minister an assurance on that point also.

One of our reasons for tabling the other new clauses in this group is to provide that, at an early stage in the planning of a concession road, steps will be taken to make sure that the road complies with relevant national, regional and local policies. In new clause 1 we are unashamedly pursuing a theme that was raised during earlier stages of the Bill.

The new clause reflects our debates in Committee. At that stage, the Minister referred several times to the proposed concession roads in the west midlands—the western orbital route and the Birmingham northern relief road. The new clause and a number of other Opposition amendments are designed, in part, to reflect concern expressed by local authorities in that part of the country. In Committee, we considered a new clause that would have required a highway authority, before inviting tenders from the private sector, to satisfy itself that the concession road proposal was consistent with relevant policies. That new clause was withdrawn following fairly lengthy debate, and the revised version takes account of that debate.

The Minister, in support of his case for rejecting the new clause at that stage, outlined what he saw as being the six key steps in the approval of a concession road. I remember this vividly. The first step was the selection of the route. The Minister made it clear that there were two ways in which a route could be selected—by the highway authority or by the prospective concessionaire. He said:

"My argument, in brief, is that environmental considerations start from the word go."

We absolutely agree. He continued:

"Where there is no preferred route and some of the groundwork has not been done any sensible contractor will take into account the likely environmental impact."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 14 March 1991; c. 13.]

Step two was a competition for the building of a road along the preferred route or within a broadly defined corridor. Step three was the designation of the winner of the competition, and the drafting and signing of a concession agreement between the winner and the highway authority. Step four was the publication of the draft orders for the special road, including detailed designs. Step five was the public inquiry to consider the environmental impact of the proposed road. Step six was the announcement of the decision following the public inquiry.

In response to debates on the environmental impact of concession roads and their effects on local planning policies, the Minister emphasised the importance of the public inquiry. However, it is clear from the timetable, as outlined, that important decisions will have to have been taken by the time the inquiry is held. A decision in principle that the road is necessary will have been taken by the highway authority—most probably the Secretary of State—and the selection between a number of means of providing the road may well have been made. This point has been brought to my attention by the local authorities and has been highlighted in correspondence between the Department of Transport and the metropolitan districts in the west midlands.

The secretary to the west midlands planning and transportation sub-committee wrote to the Department in March, expressing serious reservations about plans for the development of the western orbital route and the Birmingham northern relief road, to be financed under the provisions of the Bill and to be operated as toll roads. The Department's response attempted to reassure the authorities that the wider economic, traffic and environmental effects of any tender submissions would all be taken into account in deciding the winner.

I appreciate the fact that this is somewhat confusing. The Minister has been arguing that the appropriate stage for detailed environmental scrutiny of toll road proposals is the public inquiry, yet he has acknowledged that the decision in principle to build a road is taken at a much earlier stage and that environmental considerations start from the word go. Developers submitting proposals to the Department are expected to have taken environmental factors into account, and a range of environmental and economic considerations will be taken into account in deciding who the prospective concessionaire should be.

However, the Bill as drafted is silent on all those points. It was precisely to fill that gap that we tabled the new clause. It reflects the various ways in which concession road proposals could be developed. In essence, it would do no more than write into the Bill the assurances that the Minister has already given. The importance of environmental considerations and of securing the implementation of transport and land use policy make it essential that those assurances are embodied in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will announce that further consideration will be given to those issues.

Amendment No. 37, standing in my name and in the names of several of my hon. Friends, concerns environmental duty. The Bill, as amended in Committee, provides no power to ensure that the private sector will consider the wider consequences of its activities. For that reason, we are suggesting the inclusion of a general environmental duty. It is necessary to have such a provision so that private road developers may be put in the same position as public authorities in respect of the general responsibility to protect the environment affected by their activities.

Currently, public authorities are very clearly required, in several Acts of Parliaments, to consider the environmental effects of their actions. The duty applying

to all public authorities is contained in section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968. If public authorities have such a statutory duty, can the Minister assure us there will be a similar duty in relation to the financing arrangements for private toll roads? As private companies become increasingly involved in activities previously the domain solely of public authorities, it is vital that the same level of responsibility and concern for the environment should apply.

Let us consider how the Environmental Protection Act 1990 deals with some of these issues. There may not be a direct relationship, but that Act certainly contains a provision to the effect that British Rail is responsible for embankment litter. We must ensure that private companies have the same environmental protection responsibilities and duties. As we pointed out in Committee, it is clear that there are good precedents for this. The Electricity Act 1957, in a section entitled "Preservation of amenity"—which requires the generating board and the area boards to take into account the effects of their proposals on countryside, wildlife and historical features—provides such a precedent. The same concern has arisen in respect of the electricity industry and the coal industry. We simply wish to ensure that, with regard to environmental duties, the Bill falls into line with other pieces of legislation.

We have heard from the Government a great deal about the importance that they attach to environmental protection. It seems to us that they could go further down this road. They have paid lip service to the principle but are not prepared to commit themselves fully in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will give us some assurances on these important issues.

Mr. Fearn: I want to make it clear from the outset that my party is not against toll roads in principle. However, we are concerned about the impact on the environment if parts I and II of the Bill are enacted. It is obvious from the amendments that have been tabled that many people share that concern for the environment. New clauses 5 and 6 are not too dissimilar from amendments debated in Standing Committee. It is important that the issue should be raised again today.

I would have given my full support to new clause 1 and withdrawn my amendments if I had believed that it was easy to establish what national, regional and local environmental land use and transport policies really are and, where they exist, that they were formulated with environmental impact as a major concern. I do not believe that that is the case. Perhaps a few local authorities have good land use and transport policies, but many have not, as we are all aware. As for national strategies and policies, where are they and what are they?

6.30 pm

As far as I am concerned, the national transport policy consists of building new roads at the expense of other transport systems. In such an atmosphere, any special road scheme is likely to fit in with national policy. Local people and the public at large have a right to know the immediate and future consequences for the environment of privately-funded roads.

An article in *The Guardian* last Monday week referred to a claim by Friends of the Earth that 17 new towns and villages may be built if a proposed privately funded motorway along the east coast of England goes ahead. The development potential associated with private toll roads causes alarm.

The Minister brushed that concern aside in Standing Committee by stating:

"Any development adjacent to the road. . .is subject. . .to normal planning laws."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 14 March 1991; c. 26.]

I am afraid that that comment does not fill me with confidence. I am sure that hon. Members can identify planning decisions that fly in the face of the wishes of local people or decisions that have had damaging effects on the environment. The possible changes in land use and the associated effects cause alarm. Local planning authorities should be involved in the overall decision making with regard to road construction. Future patterns of land use should be identified and publicised at an early date to allow for differing views to be aired.

There was much debate in Committee about when and at what stage an environmental assessment should be conducted and about what that assessment would entail. Most of the time, the Minister appeared to think that the public inquiry process was the right forum, although he later appeared to say that environmental considerations would be taken into account from the very beginning. That confusion is still prevalent. If it is to be left to the public inquiry stage, that will be far too late, as we are led to believe that the public inquiry is the fifth stage in a six-stage process. I do not share the Minister's faith in the public inquiry system.

There is no guarantee that, in an inquiry, the environmental considerations will be given the weight that is demanded in today's climate. Once again, we are all aware of cases in which the public inquiry system has proved to be a poor method of protecting environmentally sensitive areas and in which the scope of environmental considerations was very limited. It is also theoretically possible for a road to be built without a public inquiry, and the Secretary of State has the power to overrule the decision of any such inquiry.

In Committee, the Minister made many well-intentioned statements on the Government's behalf and on behalf of the unknown concessionaire. I am afraid that good intentions with regard to the environment are not sufficient. Clear objectives must be written into the Bill.

Previously, when public money has been involved, environmental considerations have taken second place to financial considerations. The fact that the Government face one, and possibly three, prosecutions by the European Community is an indictment of their commitment to protect the environment. Why should we be reassured when private money is involved, particularly when we are dealing with a Government whose underlying philosophy is that all problems can be resolved with private profit and through the marketplace? What chance is there of such a Government turning away private investment if to do so would mean that the road would have to be funded from the public purse?

I am pleased to see that the Minister has taken some of the environmental concerns on board in new clause 3. Although I will support new clause 4, which is wider in scope and offers more guarantees, we must still go further. The Minister was also fond of saying in Committee that private roads should not be treated any differently from public roads. At the time the Minister misinterpreted my

support of his view. It would be acceptable if the environmental assessment for public roads was as far-reaching as today's amendments.

I press the Government for a commitment that there will be an early reform of the environmental assessment procedure for all roads. Until that reform has been carried out, privately funded roads should be treated differently because they are different. They start from a completely different premise. Privately funded roads will be driven by a profit motive. The concessionaire's first responsibility will be to shareholders and not to the public.

Despite some protests to the contrary, I am convinced that private toll roads will be development-led. I do not envisage a private enterprise coming forward on the basis of profit from tolls alone. The tolls would have to be high, and the risks would be too great for the concessionaire. I am also concerned that a Bill of this type will create a culture of road building. It will allow greater emphasis to be placed on roads—even more than there is now—at the expense of other forms of transport and at the expense of the environment.

Liberal Democrats are committed to finding ways of reducing the need to build more roads. Before any road is built, and particularly before a privately funded road is built with its potential for development, a thorough assessment of providing alternative means of transport should be carried out, and wherever feasible a highway authority should consider ways to fund alternatives including attracting private finance.

There are many possible alternatives, including light rail schemes, reopening existing unused railway lines and, in some cases, opening new ones. Other means may include finding ways to improve existing modes and if necessary providing a missing link to meet the requirements of an integrated travel system.

I stress the importance of ensuring that, before this part of the Bill comes into force, we build in a safeguard to protect the environment from unnecessary and unwanted destruction. The only way to do that is to write into the Bill a requirement to carry out an environmental impact assessment incorporating the objectives that I have outlined. The assessment should be carried out at the earliest possible moment before the wheels are set in perpetual motion. I listened carefully to the Minister as he moved new clause 3, but he did not answer the points that I have just made.

Mr. Freeman: I must tell the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) that my advice is that every toll road will be covered as a result of the amendments. The hon. Lady described a hypothetical situation in which what she described as a private toll road might not be covered. If she reflects on that and takes further advice, I hope that she will accept my assurance that the intention is that all toll roads, whether initiated, authorised or sponsored by the Secretary of State or by a local highway authority, will be covered. That is the intention and I have taken the best possible advice on that subject.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North referred to environmental assessments. The Government regard the environmental assessment process as extremely important and we share that view with the Opposition and with the CPRE.

On the proposed high-speed rail link between the tunnel and London, I have read some of the environmental assessment work that has been done so far. It is not yet published, but I hope that it will be published shortly. It is a monumental effort in respect of the eastern section—a process that has been going on for six or nine months. When a preferred route is published, there will be perhaps six to 12 months of further work, before the planning permission process can even commence, for the environmental assessment of the western part of the route. We take the matter seriously. British Rail is taking it seriously. It is extremely important, and that is why I am glad to have brought forward the new clause.

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister tempts me by his references to the Government's deep concern about environmental assessments. I wonder whether he thinks that relevant to that concern and the new clause is the prosecution on the M3 extension going through Twyford Down, the possible prosecution of the Government by the European Community over the Hackney-M11 link, and the possible prosecution for driving a road through Oxleas wood.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would not allow me to be tempted to go down that route. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) knows what we are discussing and my specific responsibilities. There will be many opportunities to discuss the specifics. In a moment, I might mention the M40 and the east coast motorway, which have been referred to.

The argument of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North was that we must establish need first. The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) said on a quite separate but related point that we must have an environmental assessment at the outset. The two points are related, but not directly.

On need, I cannot commend the encapsulation of that thought in a legislative amendment to a Bill as the right way to proceed. First, it should be fairly apparent that if there is a process by which either the Secretary of State as the road authority or the local authority is overseeing a toll road procedure, that authority, whether central Government or local government, will have had to be satisfied that there was a need in the first place. That is a practical point. It cannot be escaped; it is an essential part of the process. Secondly, I regard the process as iterative. I do not regard it as being logically compartmentalised into need or environmental assessment stages being exclusively completed at a certain procedural point before a toll road is completed.

The lack of need or the greater need for a road, or the precise environmental impact, will become clearer as the process proceeds. We know that it is quite a long process for the Birmingham relief road. I was criticised because of what was regarded as an excessive delay in the construction of the Birmingham northern relief road, in part because of the very detailed procedures that have to be gone through. That is why the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North and I part company about incorporating an amendment to require a specific statutory procedure for establishing need. It will happen anyway. It is difficult to set down in precise legal terminology what needs to be done, because it would be a fairly exhaustive list of references.

Ms. Walley: I can understand the Minister's point about difficulties and trying to introduce an amendment at this stage. However, if he gives the matter the importance

[Ms. Walley]

that we give it, will he assure us that he will fully review the departmental standard in relation to environmental assessment? If he would give that commitment, we could start to examine the way in which decisions are made, their timing and their relation to the need for road planning. That would take us some further way towards greater environmental protection.

Mr. Freeman: I am happy to give that assurance. I alluded to it in Committee, but, for the sake of clarity, I repeat that assurance. We expect advice before the end of the year on the modalities—for example, how we quantify some of the consequences of road building, whether toll roads or public roads, on the environment. That matter is extremely important. It is equally important for rail schemes. I give that assurance to the hon. Lady and, through her, to other hon. Members and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, of which, as the hon. Lady knows, I am a member. I have as much interest as she has. I fully expect to receive advice before the end of the year. We shall consult on the conclusions before any changes are introduced.

6.45 pm

The hon. Lady talked about the M40. Whether it was my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State or my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic who talked about a corridor for growth, I hope that the hon. Lady is not taking that comment out of context. It is an important corridor between the west midlands and London. That is the sense in which the comment was made. The hon. Member for Southport mentioned the east coast motorway. That is not a Department of Transport scheme. It is not promoted by us; it is promoted by a group of local authorities and private sector contractors. It has a long way to go before it reaches serious consideration by the Department.

I do not believe that the toll roads that I have seen or can conceive of as viable or acceptable will be developer-led. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's view that that evil will come about. If there is to be any development, it must come about through the normal planning procedure. No provision in the Bill gives any right of compulsory purchase or any short-cuts through the planning procedures for the construction of a toll road.

Ms. Walley: As the Minister has given an assurance that he will consult with the Council for the Protection of Rural England on environmental assessments in relation to all roads, public and private, will he give the same undertaking on the extent to which new roads allow more development to happen? I quoted the director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. The Minister would best be advised by that body on the relationship of the extent to which developments arise out of new road building.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Lady has had a concession from me, and she seeks to extend it even further. Let us be quite clear about what I said. I said that advice from the standing advisory committee on how environmental assessments are made and how we quantify the impact on the environment is expected before the end of the year. That is the subject on which we shall consult. I cannot give wider assurances about how the procedure is carried out. I am aware of the views of the CPRE, but that is not the subject of the Bill or what I am seeking to address.

The hon. Lady asked me for an assurance about the duty to take care of the environment—a conservation duty—and whether it would indirectly be placed upon concessionaires. I can give her that assurance. Highway authorities, whether the Secretary of State for Transport, local authorities or their opposite numbers in Scotland, are public bodies and are bound by the legislation. Therefore, by definition, they have control over the activities of concessionaires.

The hon. Member for Southport spoke about the environmental assessment procedure occurring at a very early stage prior to the signing of a concession agreement, which, as he knows, is part of the procedure before the public inquiry so that the public inquiry has something specific to consider. The implication of his suggestion is that one must go public on the various proposals of the competitors. If there are three, each must be subject to an environmental assessment so that there is a full public debate. That goes a little further than what happens with a public road scheme, for which there is normally a helpful leaflet, an exhibition and a public consultation procedure on the options—A, B, or C—before draft road orders are drawn up for a preferred route upon which the Secretary of State for Transport, if it is a trunk road, will decide.

I understand the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Southport—and it is probably shared by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North—that there is no obvious public participation in the social and, especially, the environmental impact of the alternatives before the selection of a winner, or potential concessionaire, who then makes public his proposal. Then an assessment or statement has to be completed; then a public inquiry.

I understand that argument, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman satisfaction. The point troubles me, but I cannot see a solution, for three reasons. First, there would be a greater blight if, for example, the three final competitors had to publish the details of their routes so that an environmental assessment could take place, and that is leaving aside the question whether the private sector companies would be prepared to disclose their propositions at an early stage.

Secondly, I do not honestly believe that a specific proposal could be tested unless it was enshrined in a concession agreement. A specific route needs to be analysed in terms of its environmental impact, but if an assessment were sought at a much earlier stage the ideas would be far too vague and woolly.

Thirdly, environmental assessment is part of the whole process of bringing a toll road proposal to a conclusion. Proper understanding of the environmental impact of a road is important for the private contractor right from the word go. He must talk to the local authorities, the statutory bodies and the lobby groups in order to understand some of the issues. If he does not, he will not be successful.

Mr. Fearn: Does not the Minister agree that, behind any successful concessionaire, there would have to be something which he said I described as an evil—although I am not sure whether I used that word? There could be a hidden agenda to favour development-led schemes.

Mr. Freeman: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance in respect of that assertion, but the propositions that I have seen which, speaking on behalf of the Government, I believe are likely to be acceptable and viable are not developer-led. If such a proposition were to be advanced—I have seen this with some putative rail schemes—I do not believe that it would commend itself either to the local authorities, which in the case of a major national scheme have the power to force a public inquiry, or to local opinion.

The hon. Gentleman is asking the impossible. I cannot give him an assurance that no scheme would be motivated by such factors, but it is neither our policy nor our intention that such roads should be born of a desire to capitalise on developer gain.

Mr. Fearn: The Minister referred to schemes that he had already seen. Does that mean that there are schemes for toll roads already before us?

Mr. Freeman: No, I was referring to schemes that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has already announced. I hope that I have answered all the questions asked during the debate.

Ms. Walley *rose*——

Mr. Freeman: Clearly, I have not.

Ms. Walley: Briefly, and for the sake of clarity on the issue of the environmental duty, I should like to check with the Minister whether I heard him correctly. Was he saying that private companies, by virtue of taking a licence from the highway authority, would have the same duties as public authorities in connection with the prescription of section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Lady knows that that was not what I said. Because public sector bodies are bound by the legislation, they will ensure that those to whom they grant a concession or licence will also take care of their environmental duties. I know that that may not be acceptable to the hon. Lady, but my argument on amendment No. 37 was that I honestly believed the proposal to be unnecessary. The hon. Lady may believe in writing into law that which is unnecessary, but as a Conservative I do not.

The legislation on the duty of conservation is laudable, and general in nature. The procedures already in the Bill are sufficient to ensure that, right from the conception of an idea through the whole process until the final confirming orders, an environmental conservation duty will be uppermost in the minds of the promoters of roads. I hope that the hon. Lady does not believe that, simply because toll roads are involved, the private sector promoters will have a lesser duty and interest in minimising and mitigating the environmental impact than would be the case if a public road were involved.

Ms. Walley: The Minister says that nothing should be written into the Bill, and that the duties will be taken up by any respectable private company. Will he consider giving advice and guidance to private companies on carrying out that which for local authorities and other public bodies is a duty, but which they will be expected to undertake voluntarily?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are not in Committee but on Report. We are making very slow progress.

Mr. Freeman: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall try to ensure that we make progress as fast as we can. The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that the amendment concerning concession agreements, which I hope we shall soon reach, will provide a solution to her problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 8

CONCESSION STATEMENT

'.—(1) Before making a toll order a highway authority shall publish a concession statement.

(2) The concession statement shall contain details of any provisions in the concession agreement for the special road concerned in relation to—

(a) the exercise of highway functions by the concessionaire;

(b) the design, construction and maintenance standards of the road;

(c) the policing of the road and the provision of other emergency services;

(d) the arrangements for monitoring the performance of the concessionaire in the management of the road;

(e) the arrangements for winter maintenance and other emergency clearance operations on the road and the standards to be adopted;

(f) the provision of service and refreshment facilities;

(g) the reversion of the road to the highway authority; and

(h) any other matters prescribed by the Secretary of State.'.—*[Ms. Ruddock.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Ruddock: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment No.71, in clause 6, page 5, line 22, at end insert—

'(5A) The Secretary of State shall not make or confirm the scheme or toll order unless it is accompanied by a concession statement fulfilling the requirements of section (concession statement) below.'.

Government amendments Nos. 28 and 105.

Ms. Ruddock: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Opposition intend to make good progress.

We tabled the new clause and the amendment because of an obvious deficiency in the Bill. We pursued the matter in Committee and felt that we had had a positive response from the Minister, but we still felt it necessary to table the new clause because we were uncertain whether the Government's response at this stage would be satisfactory. I am pleased to tell the House that we think that it probably will be.

The new clause would require a highway authority, before making a toll order, to publish a concession statement. It sets out a number of subjects that would have to be covered in such a statement. We believe that it represents the legitimate interests of road users and of organisations such as local authorities. There is no requirement in the Bill for concession agreements to be published—indeed, the Government rejected moves to enforce the publication of agreements on the ground that some of their content might be commercially confidential.

[Ms. Ruddock]

The new clause makes allowance for that by requiring the publication of a statement covering aspects of the agreement rather than the agreement as a whole.

The Minister's response to the demands that we made in Committee is reflected in Government amendments Nos. 28 and 105. Those amendments are welcome and, if I can elicit certain assurances from the Minister, they may be as acceptable to us as is our new clause. Unlike new clause 8, amendment No. 28 does not specify the content of the statement. It leaves that to regulations. We concede that there may be some merit in doing that. It is on that matter that we seek assurances. Does the Minister intend to cover in the regulations the issues listed in new clause 8? I am sure that he appreciates that I seek his assurances on that general point.

Perhaps the Minister will also understand if I raise one specific and additional point. New clause 8(2) (c) refers to the policing of concession roads. The costs of policing toll roads were discussed in some detail in Committee. The Minister said that the Government had reviewed their position and considered that concessionaires should be required to meet the cost of policing concession roads only where those roads did not form part of a public highway.

Since the debates in Committee, the implications of parts I and II of the Bill for the police have been considered by several police authorities. On 11 April, the general purposes committee of West Midlands police authority resolved that efforts should be made to ensure that

"the police are able to recover their full costs from concessionaires of any activities undertaken with regard to concession roads."

On 10 May, the finance and policy committee of Greater Manchester police authority agreed to support the views expressed by West Midlands police authority.

Given that there is increasing anxiety on the issue of policing, it would be helpful if the Minister could tell us whether there is anything to prevent an agreement being reached between a highway authority and a concessionaire that provides for the concessionaire to contribute to the cost of policing the road.

Having raised that specific point with the Minister, and in the interests of making rapid progress, it remains only for me to remind the Minister that his response to our query on the content of the proposed regulations will determine our attitude to pressing the new clause.

7 pm

Mr. Freeman: I shall seek to be brief on this point. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) for implying that she might find Government amendment No. 28 and the parallel Scottish amendment acceptable instead of her new clause 8. She raised a couple of points. First, she asked what was likely to be in the regulations. We agreed in Committee that we would like a summary of the concession agreement to be published for all those interested prior to the public inquiry. However, concession agreements are often voluminous and the hon. Lady agreed that it was unreasonable to expect them all to be published. Without commitment, I can tell the hon. Lady that most of what the new clause suggests would commend itself to inclusion in draft regulations. We shall consult on the regulations before they are presented to Parliament.

The hon. Lady's second point was about policing. I am not sure that she reported accurately what I said in Committee. Detailed arrangements for particular roads can be covered in the concession agreement. There may be circumstances in which the concessionaire and the highway authority wish to reach agreement on the arrangements. That would be entirely a matter for them. I make it clear that, as a general policy, toll roads for which the Government see a need and which by definition qualify for the roads programme should be policed at public expense. After all, they are part of the Queen's highway and are public highways.

I see no logical reason for separating toll roads from publicly financed free roads. Any category of user permitted to use the toll road has an absolute right to use that road. It would be neither fair nor reasonable to argue that there should be any impediment or disincentive to the emergency services, including the police, to cover those roads.

In conclusion—I seek to be brief—on some roads, perhaps those which are not in the roads programme, a concession agreement could be reached which covered policing responsibilities and the apportionment of cost.

Ms. Ruddock: I am grateful to the Minister. Those assurances are satisfactory to us. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

CONCESSION AGREEMENTS

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 15, at end insert—

'(5A) The Secretary of State shall issue a code of practice giving guidance on the matters to be dealt with in the concession agreement; and in entering into a concession agreement a highway authority shall have regard to any such code of practice.'.

As you asked us to make progress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, too, intend to be brief.

The effect of the amendment would be to require the Secretary of State to issue a code of practice on the contents of concession agreements. A highway authority entering into such an agreement would have to have regard to the contents of the code. This would apply whether the highway authority was the Department of Transport or a local authority.

The concession agreement is the kernel of parts I and II of the Bill—it is the document which gives a company the right to charge a toll on a road in return for having built it and undertaken to maintain and operate it. The concession agreement is defined in the first line of the first clause in the Bill.

It is inevitable, therefore, that the concept of the agreements has been the subject of amendments at every stage of the Bill's parliamentary process. Amendments have been primarily aimed at agreements. They have attempted both to define the basic content of the agreements and to probe the Government's mind on what issues can legitimately be included in agreements—subject, inevitably, to the acceptance of both parties to an agreement.

The subjects that we have raised in debates include environmental responsibilities; links between the concession road and the local highway network; design and

construction standards applying to the road maintenance arrangements; the provision of service and refreshment facilities; and arrangements for the reversion of the road to the public sector.

In response to debates Ministers have fought shy of attempting to define the likely contents of an agreement in the Bill. For example, in Committee the Minister said that the concession agreement was

"a contract between the highway authority and the successful concessionaire. It is a long, technical document containing what would normally be classified as information in commercial confidence."

He went on to argue that he hoped that

"the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford does not expect too much from the concession agreement. It is an important document, but it should not be prescriptive."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, c. 50-51.]

Presumably the Minister did not mean that the agreement should not be prescriptive—as a contract, it must, by definition, be prescriptive—but that the Bill should not be prescriptive about the contents of agreements. If so, the Minister's argument has some validity. The contents of an agreement must inevitably reflect local needs and circumstances; and the content of agreements is likely to change and develop over time.

But there is also a strong case for some guidance or ground rules on the context in which individual agreements would be formulated. The contents of concession agreements are bound to be the subject of negotiation between a highway authority—in most cases the Secretary of State—and the prospective concessionaire. It is important that the travelling public and other authorities are protected against the possibility of the highway authority giving too much away to the concessionaire in an effort to secure the company's agreement to construct the road.

A code of practice along the lines proposed in the amendment would set out the ground rules against which individual agreements could be judged. It could also contain advice that would be of use to both highway authorities and companies considering entering into an agreement. A code of practice would also be capable of being amended and updated in the light of experience.

Mr. Freeman: In this Bill we are responsible for more codes of practice than in any other piece of legislation in the past 10 years. I accept the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman said. Clearly some guidance will be needed at the outset. I give an assurance that a circular will be issued to all local authorities at the outset.

On a prescriptive code of practice, I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that one probably needs some experience of operating toll roads. It would not be sensible to issue any non-statutory code at the outset. We trust local highway authorities to have the good sense to get on with the task, if they are minded to introduce toll roads. I hope that some of them will. However, I am under no illusions that initially the initiative will rest with the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Scotland. I do not rule out a code of practice, but not at the outset. To begin with, there will be a guidance circular. If its provisions need to be encapsulated more precisely in a code of practice later, so be it.

Mr. McAvoy: How would the environmental aspect be encompassed in a circular?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the circular that is to be issued at the outset, I hope that he will bear with me if I do not detail all the elements that will be included in it. However, I can give him a clear assurance that all the environmental aspects will be covered—in particular, environmental assessment, the procedure for consultation and the procedure for taking into account the views of those who have an appellate right to express their opinions about the construction of a particular road. These are absolutely central issues. I hope that there is no political divide on the importance of a proper and full environmental assessment. I hope that, having heard those comments, the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to the Minister for his co-operative attitude. The assurances that he has given are most welcome. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 27, in page 2, line 16, leave out subsection (6).

Schedule 2

PROCEDURE IN CONNECTION WITH TOLL ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 97, line 2, at end insert—

'(3) Where the special road to which the toll order relates is to be subject to a concession, the Secretary of State or the local highway authority shall make available for inspection with the copy of the draft order or of the order, as the case may be, a statement containing such information as may be prescribed with respect to the concessionaire and the concession agreement.

The notice under sub-paragraph (1) or (2) shall indicate that such a statement will be so available for inspection.

(4) In sub-paragraph (3) "prescribed" means prescribed by the Secretary of State by regulations made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—[*Mr. Freeman.*]

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 38, in page 98, line 15, at end insert—

'Special parliamentary procedure where existing highway appropriated or transferred

8A.—(1) A toll order shall be subject to special parliamentary procedure where—

(a) the relevant special road scheme provides for the appropriation by or transfer to the special road authority of an existing highway comprised in the route prescribed by the scheme, and

(b) the toll order authorises the charging of tolls for the use of that existing highway or any part of it,

unless the Secretary of State is satisfied as regards all classes of traffic entitled to use the existing highway that another reasonably convenient route free of toll is available, or will be provided before the date on which the appropriation or transfer takes effect, and certifies accordingly.

(2) Where the Secretary of State proposes to give such a certificate, he shall—

(a) give public notice of his intention to do so,

(b) afford an opportunity to all persons interested to make representations and objections, and

(c) cause a public local inquiry to be held if it appears to him to be expedient to do so, having regard to representations or objections made,

[Mr. Freeman]

and before deciding whether to give the certificate he shall consider any representations and objections made and, if an inquiry has been held, the report of the person who held the inquiry.

(3) As soon as may be after giving a certificate, the Secretary of State shall publish in the London Gazette, and in such other manner as he thinks best for informing persons affected, a notice stating that the certificate has been given.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following Government amendments: Nos. 39, 40, 72, 108 and 111 to 114.

Mr. Freeman: We have tabled this amendment in response to a point raised by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and others. What we are seeking to do in what, on the face of it, may seem to be a draconian measure is to ensure that, where any part of the existing public highway that is free and untolled is proposed to be incorporated into a toll road—there may be circumstances where that is inescapable, necessary and sensible—tough protection is provided. The concessionaire would be able to choose not to toll a specific small section of a road that was previously a public highway. If, however, it is to be tolled, the Secretary of State would be asked to certify that there was a reasonably convenient free alternative.

The certification procedure would be subject to objection and public inquiry, where necessary. If the Secretary of State could not certify that there was an alternative, or a road that could be specially constructed by the concessionaire to fulfil that requirement, there is a special parliamentary procedure. It is a very special procedure. I understand that it has been used only twice since 1945. It was last used for the Okehampton bypass. It means in essence that Parliament must make a decision. It may seem that these measures are too draconian, but the Government take seriously the view that there should be a compromise so that the public can continue to use the existing public highway.

Ms. Ruddock: I think the Minister has begun to answer my point. I had intended to ask him how he would define a reasonably free and convenient road as an alternative. I think that he has just acknowledged that it might not be available. That would be my contention. In the circumstances that we are considering, it would be difficult to define that reasonable alternative.

7.15 pm

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's agreement.

Mr. Fearn: I thank the Minister for handling this matter very well indeed. His reply to what I proposed in Committee is very satisfactory. He referred to small sections of public road that may need to be incorporated in a toll road. Small sections would probably be ignored. Alternative routes would have to be found for larger sections. If, however, half of a proposed toll road is a public road now, how would the Minister treat it? Would the concessionaire have to put something back into the public purse, since it belongs to the highway authority and local people?

Mr. Freeman: I find it hard to conceive of circumstances in which half a proposed toll road would previously have been a public highway. I imagine that the concessionaire would say that, if one used only the public highway portion and got on or off it there, one would not pay a toll. If, however, one used the whole of a toll road incorporating a previously untolled portion of the public highway, the toll would be commensurately reduced. The toll would cover, therefore, only that portion of road space that was a toll road. If there is to be a toll—and that is a big "if"—a public alternative must be built. In practical terms, if it does not already exist it will have to be provided by the concessionaire, who will have to build it into his costs. Alternatively, Parliament must make a decision. That seems to be watertight. I hope that I carry the House with me, although perhaps not entirely.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Minister take amendment No. 40 into account? I have well understood what he has just said; I follow its logic. However, amendment No. 40 throws into doubt what he has just said about amendments Nos. 38 and 39. As I understand it, amendment No. 40 is designed to prevent an order from extending tolls to part of a special road on which they have not previously applied. That seems to imply that it could lead to part of a toll road not being tolled. Is that correct?

Furthermore, some parts of the concession roads need not be tolled at all. The only circumstances in which I can envisage that being acceptable to concessionaires is possibly where there is a development gain that can be offset against the "free part" of the road. In that slightly confused way perhaps, may I ask the Minister to relate what he has said about amendments Nos. 38 and 39 to amendment No. 40?

Mr. Freeman: I can help the hon. Lady. Amendment No. 40 seeks—after we have shut, bolted, barred and padlocked the door—to ensure that there is no subsequent variation of the toll order by introducing a toll for that portion of the toll road that was previously public. The amendment has been added in an effort to make absolutely certain that no attempt can be made to take away the public's right to what is now a free and untolled public highway.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 39, in page 98, line 37, at end insert—

'9A.—(1) In relation to a toll order which is subject to special parliamentary procedure—

(a) if the order is confirmed by Act of Parliament under section 6 of the Statutory Orders (Special Procedure) Act 1945, paragraph 9 above does not apply;

(b) in any other case, that paragraph has effect subject to the following modifications—

(i) the reference in sub-paragraph (1) to the date on which the notice required by paragraph 8 is published (or first published) shall be construed as a reference to the date on which the order becomes operative under the Act of 1945, and

(ii) in sub-paragraph (5) the words "and shall become operative" to the end shall be omitted.

(2) The provisions of paragraph 9(1) to (3) and (5) above apply in relation to a certificate under paragraph 8A as in relation to a toll order, subject to the following modifications—

(a) the reference in sub-paragraph (1) to the notice required by paragraph 8 shall be construed as a reference to the notice required by paragraph 8A(3), and

(b) in sub-paragraph (5) for "made or confirmed" substitute "given" and omit the words from "and shall become operative" to the end.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 8

AMOUNT OF TOLLS CHARGEABLE BY CONCESSIONAIRE

Ms. Walley: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 5, line 41, leave out from 'if' to end of line 43 and insert—

'(a) the road to which the order relates consists of or includes a major crossing to which there is no reasonably convenient alternative, or

(b) the highway authority and concessionaire agree that it should do so.'.

I shall attempt to be as brief as I possibly can, to speed up the proceedings.

We believe that this is a flexible amendment that deals with meeting transport needs. It moves away from the market forces that the Government are so concerned about. Only through clause 8 is it possible to regulate cases that apply to major crossings. The amendment would change that by allowing tolls to be regulated, but only where the highway authority and the concessionaire agreed that the regulation would be appropriate. The matter was discussed in Committee and the Government thought that this was a wrecking amendment, but that is not so. Perhaps some examples from the west midlands will show the importance of further regulation being incorporated in the Bill.

I should like to quote from a letter sent by the secretary of the west midlands planning and transportation sub-committee to the Department of Transport. The letter expresses concern about the proposal that the western orbital route and the Birmingham northern relief road should be developed as concession roads. The sub-committee contains representatives of the seven metropolitan district councils in the west midlands. The letter said that the tolling of the two roads was of great concern to the west midlands conurbation as a whole. I know that the Minister is aware of that. The letter states:

"It is likely that traffic volume on the M5 and M6 through the conurbation will not be significantly reduced as drivers will continue to use the free routes unless there is a significant benefit to them."

The Department replied in a letter dated 24 April which states:

"You question the benefits that a tolled road would offer by way of relief to the M5 and M6. In order to establish a viable business the operator of a tolled road would have to attract a substantial number of road users by means of a competitive toll."

In that context, the Department was looking at market forces that would encourage the concessionaire to build the road in the first place rather than at the whole issue of transport needs, which the amendment addresses. When transport needs that a road is intended to meet involve taking traffic away from an existing route, it is essential for the highway authority to be able to ensure that the toll is set at a level that will achieve that objective. That is why we have tabled the amendment.

The amendment would allow tolls to be regulated only where agreement had been reached between the highway authority and the concessionaire. Circumstances may emerge in which a prospective concessionaire proposes a toll road which the highway authority is prepared to accept, provided that the level of the toll can be regulated. Rather than back out completely, the concessionaire may be prepared to accept that condition—subject, of course, to the rules and regulations being agreed.

The Bill does not allow for such an agreement, but the amendment would provide some flexibility and, in appropriate circumstances, will enable highway authorities to take advantage of private sector finance while at the same time protecting the interests of the road user through toll regulations.

I urge the Minister not to dismiss our amendment by calling it a wrecking amendment, but to agree that in some circumstances it might be highly pragmatic to go beyond the tight constraints of clause 8 and consider regulation where there was agreement between the parties concerned.

Mr. Freeman: In some circumstances, the concessionaires and the highway authority will want to agree on regulating tolls, and there is nothing in the Bill to prevent it. The hon. Lady does not believe in toll roads; for her it is a hypothetical problem, because she will never be in a position to negotiate with concessionaires. We strongly believe in toll roads and think that the Birmingham northern relief road and the western orbital route will bring great benefits to the west midlands. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will shortly be able to make a statement about a further stage in the process of bringing the western orbital route to fruition.

The Government do not see a case for regulating the tolls on either of those two roads. They are not monopolies, and there will be public alternatives. There is a case for regulation over estuarial crossings on which there is a monopoly, and that is written into the Bill. We do not intend to enter into any agreement with any concessionaires to regulate or limit the tolls on toll roads over which the Secretary of State for Transport has a control. However, there is nothing in the Bill to prevent others from doing so. I hope that that reassures the hon. Lady.

Ms. Walley: I am not as reassured as the Minister might think. However, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 11

VARIATION OR REVOCATION OF TOLL ORDER

Amendment made: No. 40, in page 7, line 38, at end insert

'; and a toll order which does not authorise the charging of tolls in respect of the whole length of the special road to which it relates may not be varied so as to extend the length of road in respect of which tolls may be charged.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 12

EXTENSION TOLL ORDERS

Amendments made: No. 29, in page 8, line 28, leave out 'and'.

No. 30, in page 8, line 29, at end insert

', and

section *(Annual report on concession agreements and toll orders)* (annual report by Secretary of State).'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 13

FURTHER PROVISIONS AS TO CHARGING OF TOLLS

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 8, line 44, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 9 and insert—

[Mr. Freeman]

'(a) a police vehicle, identifiable as such by writing or markings on it or otherwise by its appearance, if being used for police purposes;
(b) an ambulance as defined in section 4(2) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971;
(c) a fire engine as so defined;
(d) a vehicle exempt from duty under that Act by virtue of—
section 4(1)(g) of that Act (invalid carriages),
section 4(1)(kb) of that Act (vehicles used for carriage of disabled persons by recognised bodies), or
section 7(2) of that Act (vehicles used by or for purposes of disabled person).'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments:

No. 36, in page 9, line 3, at end insert—
'(c) a vehicle diverted on to the concession road by a police constable.'.

Government amendments Nos. 32, 78 and 79.

Mr. Freeman: I can be brief because the hon. Gentleman to whom I would have been responding, the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), is not in his place. Therefore, I shall record briefly that the amendments seek to provide, as we all wish, free passage for police vehicles, ambulances, fire engines, invalid carriages and vehicles used for the carriage on toll roads of disabled persons by recognised bodies which, of course, are exempt from vehicle excise duty.

Individual toll orders could add additional categories, if that were appropriate. Amendment No. 32 and the equivalent Scottish amendment No. 79 essentially provide that the design of the toll routes should facilitate the free and unimpeded passage of these vehicles. These are uncontroversial amendments and I hope that they will be accepted.

Ms. Walley: The main Government amendments are obvious, and we cannot understand why their provisions were not in the Bill. However, we are glad to welcome them. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for pursuing the matter in Committee.

We share the concern about safety which we understand has been expressed by the West Midlands police authority, whose general purposes committee thinks that the Bill should be amended to reflect the right of the police to direct traffic to toll roads in cases of emergency or other appropriate need without penalty to the drivers of the vehicles so directed. I understand that that view is shared by the Greater Manchester police authority.

It is clear from the west midlands example that concesson roads could be designed to provide an alternative route for traffic that is currently using motorways. Does the Minister share our concern about that? In the interests of public safety, does he agree with the amendment?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) also spoke in Committee to amendment No. 36. I understand the arguments in favour of the amendment, but I am not sympathetic to them because, as I hope I explained to members of the Committee, the police powers on roads are negative, not positive. At present the police cannot direct a motorist to use another road, although they can tell him that he cannot go any further because there has been an accident or a fire. I do not want to amend the general law on police powers on roads. I hope that common sense will prevail when an accident occurs on a toll road. In any case, the hon. Lady knows that traffic often reverses down the carriageway of a motorway. Perhaps the hon. Lady is thinking about the M6 and the Birmingham northern relief road. If there is a major accident, there are well-established procedures for reversing traffic safely to the nearest exit point.

I do not envisage that it will present a practical problem. To the extent that it presents a hypothetical problem, the common sense of the owners of the toll roads —the concessionaires—will mean that in practice they will permit traffic on to the toll road if there is a dire emergency. If the accident occurs just before the entrance to a toll road, I hope—and all reasonable people would hope—that that traffic would be allowed on to the toll road.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 16

FACILITIES FOR COLLECTION OF TOLLS

Amendments made: No. 32, in page 10, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) Those responsible for the design and construction of facilities for the collection of tolls, and those responsible for the collection of tolls at such facilities, shall have due regard to the need to avoid delaying the passage of such vehicles as are mentioned in section 13(2)(a), (b) or (c) (police vehicles, ambulances and fire engines).'.

No. 33, in page 10, line 36, leave out 'valuation' and insert 'rating'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

7.30 pm

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 34, in line 39, leave out
'may be necessary or convenient'
and insert 'are reasonably required'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 73 and 80.

Mr. Freeman: This is slightly more than a technical amendment. It tightens the definition of which part of the toll booths and the equipment necessary for tolling roads should be free from rates. It tightens the present provision which describes the part of the equipment that should enjoy that facility which was described as "necessary or convenient"—I think that that was the will of the Committee—and makes it that which is "reasonably required". I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

New Clause 9

REPORT ON TOLL ROADS AND TOLL ORDERS IN SCOTLAND

'.—(1) In any calendar year in which there occurs an event to which this section applies, the Secretary of State shall in respect of that year lay before Parliament a report informing Parliament of that occurrence or, as the case may be, the number of such occurrences.

(2) This section applies to the following events—
(a) the Secretary of State enters into a contract for the design and construction of a road which is to be subject to a toll order;

(b) there is opened to public use a new road subject to a toll order for which he is the roads authority;
(c) a toll order, or an order varying or revoking a toll order, is made or confirmed by him.

(3) A report under this section shall contain such information as appears to him to be appropriate with respect to the toll orders (whenever made) which are in force during that year or any part of it.

(4) A report under this section shall be laid on or before 31st July in the following calendar year.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 10

Environmental assessment of projects involving special roads in Scotland

' .—(1) In section 20A of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (environmental assessment of certain road construction projects), after subsection (2) (cases in which environmental statement must be published) insert—

"(2A) Any project for the construction of a special road which falls within Annex II to the Directive shall be treated as having such characteristics that it should be made subject to an environmental assessment in accordance with the Directive.".

(2) In section 55A of that Act (environmental assessment of certain road improvement projects), in subsection (2) (cases in which environmental statement must be published) after the word "and" there shall be inserted the words "either the project is in respect of a special road or the project".'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 25

Toll orders

Amendments made: No. 72, in page 16, line 11, leave out 'and paragraphs 15 and 18 of Part III'
and insert
',paragraphs 15 and 18 of Part III and Part IV".

No. 73, in page 16, line 45, leave out from 'facilities' to 'for' in line 46 and insert
'within the boundary of the road or on land adjoining the road as are reasonably required'

No. 74, in page 17, line 1, leave out subsection (10).—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 28

Extension toll orders

Amendments made: No. 75, in page 18, line 39, leave out 'and'.

No. 76, in page 18, line 40 at end insert ', and
( ) section (*Report on toll roads and toll orders in Scotland*) (report by Secretary of State).'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 32

Variation or revocation of toll order

Amendment made: No. 108, in page 20, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) A toll order which does not authorise the charging of tolls in respect of the whole length of the special road to which it relates may not be varied so as to extend the length of road in respect of which tolls may be charged.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 33

Transfer or termination of assignation

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 77, in page 21, line 38, at end insert—

'(6) References in this Part to the termination of an assignation are references to the termination of the rights assigned under the assignation.'.

This a minor technical amendment. It merely makes it clear that the references to an assignation ceasing are interpreted as references to rights under an assignation ceasing which, in strict legal terms, is more correct. The amendment is necessary only to avoid any ambiguities and does not change the intended effect of any of the provisions.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 34

Further provision as to charging of tolls

Amendments made: No. 78, in page 21, line 46, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 22 and insert—

'(a) a police vehicle, identifiable as such by writing or markings on it or otherwise by its appearance, if being used for police purposes;
(b) an ambulance as defined in section 4(2) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971;
(c) a fire engine as so defined;
(d) a vehicle exempt from duty under that Act by virtue of—
section 4(1)(g) of that Act (invalid carriages),
section 4(1)(kb) of that Act (vehicles used for carriage of disabled persons by recognised bodies), or
section 7(2) of that Act (vehicles used by or for purposes of disabled person).'.

No. 79, in page 23, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) Those responsible for the design and construction of facilities for the collection of tolls, and those responsible for the collection of tolls at such facilities, shall have due regard to the need to avoid delaying the passage of such vehicles as are mentioned in section 34(2)(a), (b) or (c) (police vehicles, ambulances and fire engines).'.

No. 80, in page 23, line 38, leave out
'may be necessary or convenient'
and insert 'are reasonably required'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

New Clause 7

Charge for occupation of the highway where works unreasonably prolonged

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may make provision by regulations requiring an undertaker executing street works in a maintainable highway to pay a charge to the highway authority where—
(a) the duration of the works exceeds such period as may be prescribed, and
(b) the works are not completed within a reasonable period.

(2) For this purpose "a reasonable period" means such period as is agreed by the authority and the undertaker to be reasonable or, in default of such agreement, is determined by arbitration to be reasonable, for completion of the works in question.

In default of agreement, the authority's view as to what is a reasonable period shall be acted upon pending the decision of the arbitrator.

(3) The regulations may provide that if an undertaker has reason to believe that the duration of works will exceed the prescribed period he may submit to the authority an estimate of their likely duration—

(a) in the case of works in connection with the initial placing of apparatus in the street in pursuance of a street works licence, together with his application for the licence,

(b) in the case of other works (not being emergency works), together with his notice under section 51 (notice of starting date), or

(c) in the case of emergency works, as soon as reasonably practicable after the works are begun,

and that the period stated in an estimate so submitted shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(4) The regulations may also provide that if it appears to the undertaker that by reason of matters not previously foreseen or reasonably foreseeable the duration of the works—

(a) is likely to exceed the prescribed period,

(b) is likely to exceed the period stated in his previous estimate, or

(c) is likely to exceed the period previously agreed or determined to be a reasonable period,

he may submit an estimate or revised estimate accordingly, and that if he does so any previous estimate, agreement or determination shall cease to have effect and the period stated in the new estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(5) The amount of the charge shall be determined in such manner as may be prescribed by reference to the time taken to complete the works and the extent to which the surface of the highway is affected by the works.

Different rates of charge may be prescribed according to the place and time at which the works are executed and such other factors as appear to the Secretary of State to be relevant.

(6) The regulations may make provision as to the time and manner of making payment of any charge.

(7) The regulations shall provide that a highway authority may reduce the amount, or waive payment, of a charge in any particular case, in such classes of case as they may decide or as may be prescribed, or generally.

(8) The first regulations for the purposes of this section shall not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament; subsequent regulations shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that it will be convenient also to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 53.

Government new clause 11—*Charge for occupation of the road where works unreasonably prolonged.*

Government amendments Nos. 109, 66, 67, 69 and 110.

Mr. Freeman: We have now moved from toll roads to the street works portion of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic will deal with some of the amendments but, with your agreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall deal with the first group.

New clause 7 represents the fulfilment of a commitment made in Committee to think again about the basis of charging for occupation of the road by statutory undertakers. It represents a major change and I have, as promised, consulted representatives of local authorities and the statutory undertakers since the Committee stage. I hope that the new clause and the related amendments will commend themselves to the House.

I shall explain as briefly but as accurately as I can the purpose of the new clause. First, it is designed as a permissive power. That means that the Secretary of State would bring into force by way of regulation and subject to affirmative resolution the power for highway authorities to charge for the occupation of roads only if he was convinced that it was necessary because there was an abuse. I think that we all want to expedite street works. We do not want roads to be dug up for longer than necessary.

The second important point is that the payment to the highway authorities made by those undertaking street works would be stipulated as maximum charges. There would be the opportunity to waive or to reduce the charges if that seemed sensible—for example, because they were too small or because there were circumstances in which it was not sensible to pursue the matter. That would be for the judgment of the highway authorities. However, the payment would be made only after a minimum free period which could be, for example, a week—I use that period only for illustrative purposes—so that all street works, whether they are to dig up and repair a gas main, to lay cable television or to allow British Telecom to put in new works for telephone subscribers, would be covered by the same blanket minimum free period to be prescribed in regulations.

Payment would start clocking up only on a per diem basis and perhaps on the basis of the extent to which the road was blocked, after the expiration of a reasonable period. That period which would have to be agreed between the highway authority and the statutory undertaker would clearly have to be greater than the minimum period. However, once the undertaker exceeded that reasonable period, he would be liable for a charge. The basis for the maximum charge would be set out in regulations made by the Secretary of State if he were so minded and if there were evidence of continued abuse.

Concern was expressed in Committee that we did not want all the statutory undertakers—the utilities and those that have a statutory right to dig up the road—to be clobbered for the excesses, misdemeanours or laggardliness of one or two. This mechanism means that the charge would be borne by the statutory undertaker responsible for the execessive delay and would not be a burden imposed on all which would be implied by a daily charge.

The provision also covers skips in the road and scaffolding. How often have we seen scaffolding or builders' skips left unnecessarily for long periods on the roads—in traffic sensitive or non-traffic sensitive streets —merely because the contractor or the builder had either forgotten about them or found it convenient to park them on the public road or footway. We do not want that to happen unnecessarily and new clause 7 catches both examples.

We want a powerful incentive for those who dig up the road or who have works on the road—the carriageway or the footway—to carry out those works as expeditiously as possible. We do not want to place a burden on all utilities —and hence on their customers—for all their work, some which will inevitably take some time and where a reasonable period can be agreed.

Ms. Ruddock: We are dealing with the street works part of the Bill, which is the part on which we have been able to proceed with the most harmony. However, there were some sticking points and the clause that the Government seek to amend by introducing new clause 7 was one of the major difficulties encountered in Committee.

It falls to me to congratulate the Minister on listening so well to the issues that were raised in our debates and on consulting—as I know that he has—in some depth with the local authority associations and with the utilities. Our concerns and, as I understand it, those of the local authority associations and of the utilities are met in new clause 7 and the consequent amendments. We are happy to support the new clause and the amendments. They achieve what we have sought all along—to make it clear that there is only a reserve power.

I have only a few questions that seek assurances from the Minister on behalf of the local authority associations. They are concerned that the charging relief will be implemented only if the other anti-congestion elements of the Bill are shown not to be working. The Minister has suggested that, but it would be useful if he could clearly confirm it and put it on the record. Will the Department of Transport consult with the joint highway authorities utilities committee on any decision to implement the clause and on the detail of the regulations to be made?

Will the Government work to ensure that the charging regime, if it has to be administered, is as easy to administer as possible? If the charges are introduced, will they be set at a level which will at least enable the highway authorities to recover any costs they incur in administering the scheme?

If the Minister is able to respond to those few points, Labour Members will be more than satisfied.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): I declare an interest as chairman of a cable television company.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) spoke in the way that she did. There is harmony on both sides of the House about the merits of clause 70. As the hon. Lady said, the clause caused concern in Committee, as it did to the utilities, the Cable Television Association and to the highway authorities. They all support the Bill and they understand the purpose of clause 70, but as my hon. Friend the Minister said, it punishes the class for the misdemeanours of one or two of its members and that is especially relevant to the cable television industry which is at the beginning of a long programme of cable laying in the ground. That has to be done for understandable environmental reasons. The great danger of the clause as it stood was that it would endanger investment in the cable television industry.

The utilities, the cable television industry and the highways authorities are happy with the new clause because it provides the incentive to those who dig up streets to behave properly and provides no disincentive to investment.

I add to the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Deptford to the Minister. In particular, the way in which he conducted the debates in Committee on this part of the Bill was a model of the way in which such proceedings should be conducted.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): In welcoming the new clause, I declare an interest as a consultant to British Telecom.

The new clause has achieved in a straightforward and helpful manner all that was asked of my hon. Friend the Minister in Committee and in meetings outside. There were plenty of them and he listened attentively and took a constructive attitude. I thank him for that.

The new clause has confirmed what the utilities in particular were seeking, which is that the power in the new clause should be a reserve power only, that the scheme will be essentially a charge for dilatory work rather than a broad rental fee and that free periods, when no charges are payable, will be prescribed. That was the heart of what was sought and it is at the heart of the new clause. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the help that he has given.

It will be a much simpler scheme to administer than the one previously proposed. The administrative complications of the previous scheme would have got us all into a great deal of trouble. It would have taken time and would have been costly to implement. The system in the new clause should come into effect only on relatively rare occasions when undertakings have failed to live up to the commitments that they have made to the street authority.

7.45 pm

I hope that undertakings will make doubly sure that they do not bring down on themselves the need for the implementation of the new clause. It is in their own hands to ensure that they are not faced with additional difficulties.

In Committee, we perhaps did not pay sufficient attention to the other side of the coin—the interests of road users. We considered the position of utilities and tried to ensure that their interests would be looked after as far as was possible. It is important to emphasise, however, that at no stage have hon. Members lost sight of the fact that one of the cardinal principles of the Bill is to ensure that road users have an easier right of passage along the roads of this country than has hitherto been the case, because of street works continuing for too long at the end of which the quality of the road is often impaired.

I and other hon. Members who I believe speak for road users recognise that the new clause is a strong weapon to use against an undertaking which fails to consider the interests of road users by not attempting to remove itself from a road with the minimum possible delay. It is right that we should insist that the new clause, like the clause that it replaces, ensures that road users are inconvenienced as little as possible. The proposal to introduce charges for failure to achieve rather than charges for merely being on the road at all is not a diminution of our determination to ensure that road users are able to use roads uninterrupted by the activities of undertakers.

With that point made clear, I give a warm welcome to the new clause.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for having only recently entered the Chamber. I am sure that he will realise that I should have been delighted to be more involved, having tried unsuccessfully to take a small private Bill through the House which impinged slightly on the matters before us.

New clause 7 and the amendments to schedule 8 seem —forgive me if I am wrong—to concentrate solely on charges. I support that; it is an admirable move. However, will the power to make provision by regulations enable the

[Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo]

Secretary of State under schedule 8 to deal with a code of practice that might cover some of the safety factors that arise when, for example, skips are left on the road?

In the past few years, in my constituency, skips have been left on the public highway as a result of street works, sometimes with no lighting or reflectors, and that has led to one or two nasty accidents. Responsibility for that tends to be shuffled around. The same applies to large holes in the road which result from street works. I have had constituents who do not know whether to claim compensation from the contractor, the local authority or the Ministry of Transport. Will the Minister explain whether the regulations in schedule 8 deal with such a situation and whether, in the broader context, the schedule states whether there should be road signs ahead of a skip left on the road? It is a little late when one comes round the corner and finds that there is a skip in the road, so prior warning is needed.

I have been unable to find the necessary provision in the schedule, but am happy to be told that I am wrong. Will my hon. Friend the Minister of State deal with safety aspects when skips are left on the highway for any length of time?

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): May I add my thanks to the Minister for his reasonable reaction to questions and criticisms of various aspects of this part of the Bill? I declare an interest as a parliamentary consultant to Seeboard. In this instance, I should thank Seeboard for educating me on the points that should be raised at this stage.

Will my hon. Friend the Minster give me an assurance on clause 91 which, although not presently under discussion, is related to the debate? It deals with statutory defences and the related question of prosecutions. I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister's officials have had meetings with legal representatives and that they have agreed that clause 91, as it relates to this discussion, is perfectly acceptable, and that points of confusion that need clarification can be explained in relevant codes of practice or through drafting amendments to defence provisions.

Will the Minister reassure me on those issues? I thank him, once again, for introducing the new clause.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for the comments on the way in which the Department of Transport has met concerns. The credit is entirely due to civil servants in the Department who have sought to respond to points raised in the Committee and subsequently. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) and my hon. Friends the Members for Swindon, (Mr. Coombs), for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone).

I give assurances to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on the four points that she raised. She need have no fear about any ambiguity.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South and I could correspond about the problem of skips. Section 139 of the Highways Act 1980 already deals with the guarding and lighting of skips. I assure my hon. Friend that the voluminous codes of practice and guidance which will issue forth from the Bill and which will be the direct responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic will, as far as possible, deal with the points that my hon. Friend raised. He sought to raise his concerns and those of his constituents about unlit and ill-placed skips and scaffolding. That is one of the reasons why I am grateful for his support on the new clause. We seek to have a financial penalty imposed on those who disregard common sense when expediting their work.

I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes the assurances that he sought. We have had long and detailed negotiations with the Highways and Utilities Committee which, although it was not satisfied with the outcome of all of our discussions, was satisfied with most of the key issues. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes for remiding me of that procedure. May I tell HAUC, through my hon. Friend, that if it wishes to have further clarification—not on the Bill, which I hope will complete its pasage tonight—I should be glad to respond.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 3

STREET WORKS LICENCES

Amendment made: No. 41, in page 99, line 18, leave out first 'the' and insert 'any'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Sir Peter Blaker: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 99, line 26, leave out 'or'.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take amendment No. 14, in page 99, line 27, at end insert

', or

( ) requiring the Licensee to give security for the performance of his obligations under paragraph 8 or under section 78 (liability for loss or damage caused).'.

Sir Peter Blaker: This is a paving amendment for amendment No. 14. It deals with a small but important issue on which I would welcome an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister.

Schedule 3(3) deals with the conditions that a street authority may attach to a street works licence. There seems to be a gap in those conditions, which amendment No. 14 seeks to fill. It enables the street authority to require a licensee to give security for the performance of his obligations. That is important because, under schedule 3(8), a licensee must indemnify the street authority in respect of any injury, damage or loss that his works may cause. Under clause 78, the licensee must compensate other persons—for example, utilities—whose apparatus in the roads is damaged by the execution of his work or by bursts or explosions. However, the licensee may be a person of no financial substance. Therefore, we must ensure that the street authority has the power to require a provision of security.

I would welcome a statement from my hon. Friend the Minister about whether he thinks that such a power exists. It is not mentioned in schedule 3. The issue is made more important because, under clause 46(2), the licensee no longer has to have the consent of a utility before he starts work. That is a change from the provisions of the Highways Act 1980, under which he had to have the consent of the utility before starting work. Will the Minister explain whether the street authority already has that power and, if so, where it exists?

Mr. Freeman: I hope that I can give my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) some reassurance. The amendment deals specifically with licensees—those who dig up the roads and are not statutory undertakers, such as British Gas or British Telecom. Rather, they may be companies laying computer cable across the road, which do not already have the statutory right to dig up the road. The question is whether the licensing authority—the highways authority—has the power to satisfy itself that those who dig up the roads and could damage the apparatus of statutory undertakers are not men of straw, but have sufficient financial security and safeguards. My advice is that street authorities have such powers and responsibilities in issuing licences.

While not commending the amendment to the House, I should be happy to correspond with my right hon. Friend to clarify that issue. It is already the case, under existing legislation, that people can dig up the highway, damage the apparatus of others and be sued by them. They may not be people or companies of finanical substance, so we are not creating a new problem: it already exists. We are ameliorating it with the new controls over qualifications of supervisors and operators provided for in clause 63. We want to ensure that those who dig up the roads do so in a more professional way.

I accept that licensees should be in a position to meet any claim that is made against them. They should have the necessary financial resources to defend themselves and compensate, where appropriate. However, my Department can see no evidence of that problem at present. If evidence of damage is produced, we shall certainly discuss licensing policy with HAUC, the Highways and Utilities Committee. We can give further guidance to the highway authorities about the procedure that they will follow to give licences in order to avoid problems arising for the statutory undertakers.

In summary, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South will accept my offer to communicate further with him and substantiate my claim that the power already exists for the licensing authorities to make stipulations and requirements as they deem necessary. At present, it is not necessary to deal with the problem, but if it does arise we shall be the first to institute consultations.

Ms. Walley: If the Minister is in correspondence with his right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker), will he send a duplicate copy of any letters to the Opposition so that we may be kept informed of all developments?

Mr. Freeman: That goes without saying. I have always done that and will continue to do so.

Sir Peter Blaker: In light of my hon. Friend's assurances, I seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 48

EMERGENCY WORKS

8 pm

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 42, in page 29, line 9, at end insert

'(or which the person responsible for the works believes on reasonable grounds to be existing or imminent)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 81.

Mr. Freeman: I hope that I can be brief——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The Minister had better be brief if he wants to finish the Bill tonight.

Mr. Freeman: I shall be exceedingly brief.

The amendment relates to clause 48 and deals with the problem that arose when a foreman arrived at an emergency where a gas main was leaking. Members of the Committee and utilities felt strongly that there should be no doubt in the foreman's mind that he had to get on with the job—as I am trying to do—and solve the problem. The amendment inserts the words: "believes on reasonable grounds". I hope that that meets the point raised primarily by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and all the points that were made.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 54

RESTRICTION ON WORKS FOLLOWING SUBSTANTIAL ROAD WORKS

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 43, in page 32, line 5, leave out

'which consists of or includes a carriageway'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 44 to 46 and 82 to 85.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) will be glad to know that this is the last amendment with which I shall deal personally tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) was particularly interested in the amendment, as were a number of my hon. Friends. They were worried that the Bill did not seem to provide for circumstances related to footways, cycle tracks and pedestrian ways—in which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) was interested. They were concerned about what would happen when the highway authority had prepared not only the road but the footway and cycle track. I pay tribute to the high standard of maintenance of the roads and footways of Wandsworth, with which I was immensely impressed. The borough was also extremely helpful and courteous in giving me advice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea raised a fair point in Committee. We have sought to remove any doubt on the subject. We want the 12-month restriction, subject to the road having to be dug up in an emergency, to protect the work done on carriageways, footways and cycle tracks. The amendment also suggests that we should provide, in regulations, definitions of major works. We believe that the definition originally contained in the Bill was too prescriptive and we want to consult further on that. If, within the 12-month period, consent to dig up the carriageway, footway, cycle tracks or pedestrian tracks is withheld unreasonably, we believe that there should be a procedure for arbitration.

Ms. Walley: We are grateful that there has been a further concession to cyclists and we welcome the progress that has been made.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): As a cyclist, I am particularly interested in what the Minister had to say. He

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

bragged about what had been done in Wandsworth, but he should look at Westminster. I am a cyclist and I find all the holes. It is high time that the Government got stuck into Westminster. My local authority does a first-class job on its roads, but down here when I am on my cycle morning and night it is murder. I want the Minister to look at Westminster. It is no good bragging about another local authority—let us deal with Westminster, right on the job.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): If my hon. Friend the Minister intends to take up the comments of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), will he insert a new clause in the Bill to protect the pedestrians of Wandsworth from the hon. Member for Ashfield on his bike, should he ever come across the river? If the hon. Gentleman sticks to his boat and looks from afar at the roads in Wandsworth, I am sure that he will endorse the glowing and worthy tribute that my hon. Friend paid to the council and workmen of Wandsworth for what they have achieved.

I endorse what has been said by the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) and for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) and thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his consideration in the consultation period between Committee stage and this stage, and the work that he has done to find solutions to the problems raised. I am also grateful to him for the progress that he has made on other parts of the Bill—and he should take it as read that those sentiments apply to any future progress he may make.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 44, in page 32, leave out lines 9 to 17 and insert—

'For this purpose substantial road works means works for road purposes, or such works together with other works, of such description as may be prescribed.'.

No. 45, in page 33, line 2, leave out

'(which shall not be unreasonably withheld)'.

No. 46, in page 33, line 9, at end insert—

'( ) The consent of the street authority under subsection (5)(b) shall not be unreasonably withheld; and any question whether the withholding of consent is unreasonable shall be settled by arbitration.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 55

GENERAL DUTY OF STREET AUTHORITY TO CO-ORDINATE WORKS

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I beg to move amendment No. 47, in page 33, line 26, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 48, 86 and 87.

Mr. Chope: The amendment is a direct response to a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) in Committee. After reflection, the Government have accepted the suggestion that he put forward.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 56

GENERAL DUTY OF UNDERTAKERS TO CO-OPERATE

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 34, line 10, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 57

PROTECTED STREETS

Amendments made: No. 49, in page 34, line 22, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

'( ) The consent of the street authority is required for the placing of apparatus by an undertaker in a protected street, except as mentioned below.

The following are "protected streets" for this purpose—

(a) any highway or proposed highway which is a special road in accordance with section 16 of the Highways Act 1980, and

(b) any street designated by the street authority as protected.

( ) Consent is not required for the placing of apparatus—

(a) by way of renewal of existing apparatus, or

(b) in pursuance of a street works licence,

unless, in the latter case, the licence was granted before the street became a protected street.'.

No. 50, in page 34, line 38, leave out first 'the' and insert 'any'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Schedule 4

STREETS WITH SPECIAL ENGINEERING DIFFICULTIES

Amendment made: No. 51, in page 101, line 22, leave out

'or part of a street'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 65

WORKS LIKELY TO AFFECT OTHER APPARATUS IN THE STREET

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 52, in page 38, leave out lines 24 to 34 and insert

'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the person to whom the apparatus belongs reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by him which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the apparatus or for securing access to it.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 62, 64, 65, 91, 101, 103 and 104.

Mr. Chope: The amendment is in response to points raised in Committee. My hon. Friend the Minister undertook to consider further whether the additional defences of taking all reasonable care to comply with some provisions in this part of the Bill were required. The amendments arise from further consideration of those representations and have been discussed with the utilities and the local authorities.

Mr. Simon Coombs: I raised this point in Committee and am extremely grateful to the Government for taking it on board so reasonably. I use the word "reasonably" advisedly because that was the substance of the points that we raised, and of the amendments. It seems right that an undertaking which has shown that it has acted in a reasonable manner at all times should be able to put that

forward as a defence against any accusation that it has failed to deliver on the agreements that it has made with the street authority. The Government have clearly thought carefully about that and come to the conclusion that that defence should be available. The amendments are the result of that consideration and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the way that he has brought them forward.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 70

FEE FOR OCCUPATION OF THE HIGHWAY

Amendment made: No. 53, in page 41, line 36, leave out clause 70.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 77

DUTY TO MAINTAIN APPARATUS

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 45, line 34, leave out 'safety, the' and insert 'the safety and'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendments Nos. 55 to 57 and 92 to 96.

Mr. Chope: The amendments respond to concern expressed in Committee about possible unwarranted interference by relevant authorities with an undertaker's apparatus and I hope that they meet the points raised.

Ms. Ruddock: I wish to record our appreciation of the fact that the amendment has been tabled. Concerns were expressed, particularly by local authority associations and the utilities. Clearly, the amendments meet those points and we are grateful.

Mr. Rathbone: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister again for taking into consideration the arguments made by the utilities on that subject and on the next group of amendments. Will he reassure the House that the issues raised by the utilities after the Committee stage, during the helpful discussions that his office had with their legal and practical advisers, have been met by these amendments? I think that they have, but I should be grateful for that reassurance.

Mr. Chope: I am happy to give that assurance.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 55, in page 45, line 37, leave out 'in it' and insert

'of the authority in the street'.

No. 56, in page 46, line 1, leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

'(3) If an undertaker fails to give a relevant authority the facilities required by this section—

(a) the street authority may in such cases as may be prescribed, and

(b) any other relevant authority may in any case,

execute such works as are needed to enable them to inspect the apparatus in question, including any necessary breaking up or opening of the street.

(4) If an undertaker fails to secure that apparatus is maintained to the reasonable satisfaction of a relevant authority in accordance with this section—

(a) the street authority may in such cases as may be prescribed, and

(b) any other relevant authority may in any case,

execute any emergency works needed in consequence of the failure.'.

No. 57, in page 46, line 15, at end insert—

'( ) Nothing in subsection (3) or (4) shall be construed as excluding any other means of securing compliance with the duties imposed by subsection (1).'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 78

LIABILITY FOR DAMAGE OR LOSS CAUSED

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 58, in page 46, line 18, leave out from 'any' to ', and' and insert—

'damage or loss suffered by the authority in their capacity as such'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 59 to 61 and Nos. 97 to 100.

Mr. Chope: Again, these are amendments in response to representations made on behalf of the utilities in Committee. I hope that they will meet with the approval of the House.

Mr. Simon Coombs: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. The Government have recognised the case put by the utilities that the Bill, as originally drafted, would have left undertakings in the invidious position of being liable for economic losses which would simply have been uninsurable. The amendments will limit compensation for costs reasonably incurred in making good damage to apparatus. Again, that is a most helpful move by the Government in response to the approaches made and I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 59, in page 46, leave out lines 20 and 21 and insert

'expense reasonably incurred in making good damage to that apparatus'.

No. 60, in page 46, line 40, leave out 'authority' and insert 'person'.

No. 61, in page 46, line 43, leave out 'authority' and insert 'person'.—*[Mr. Chope]*

Clause 79

WORKS FOR ROAD PURPOSES LIKELY TO AFFECT APPARATUS IN THE STREET

Amendment made: No. 62, in page 47, leave out lines 8 to 17 and insert

'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the person to whom the apparatus belongs reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by him which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the apparatus or for securing access to it.'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 81

SHARING OF COST OF NECESSARY MEASURES

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 63, in page 48, line 14, leave out from 'undertaker' to 'make' in line 28 and insert

'in such manner as may be prescribed.

(2) The regulations may make provision as to the costs allowable for this purpose.

Provision may, in particular, be made for disallowing costs of the undertaker—

[Mr. Chope]

(a) where the apparatus in question was placed in the street after the authority had given the undertaker the prescribed notice of their intention to execute the works, or

(b) in respect of measures taken to remedy matters for which the authority were not to blame,

and for allowing only such costs of either party as are not recoverable from a third party.

(3) Where the authority have a right to recover from a third party their costs in taking measures in relation to undertaker's apparatus but in accordance with section 80 it is determined that the measures should be taken by the undertaker, the right of the authority includes a right to recover the undertaker's costs in taking those measures and they shall account to the undertaker for any sum received.

(4) The regulations shall provide for the allowable costs to be borne by the authority and the undertaker in such proportions as may be prescribed.

Different proportions may be prescribed for different cases or classes of case.

(5) The regulations may require the undertaker to give credit for any financial benefit to him from the betterment or deferment of renewal of the apparatus resulting from the measures taken.

(6) The regulations may'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 102 and 68.

Mr. Chope: These amendments redraft the provisions contained in the Bill and I hope that they can be accepted without further debate.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 84

BRIDGES, BRIDGE AUTHORITIES AND RELATED MATTERS

Amendment made: No. 64, in page 50, leave out lines 13 to 24 and insert

'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the bridge authority reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by them which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the bridge or for securing access to it.'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 88

SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS AS TO DISPLAYING OF LIGHTS

Amendment made: No. 65, in page 52, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) In proceedings for such an offence it is a defence for the undertaker to show that all reasonable care was taken by him, and by his contractors and by persons in his employ or that of his contractors, to secure that no such failure occurred.'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Clause 90

POWER OF STREET AUTHORITY OR DISTRICT COUNCIL TO UNDERTAKE STREET WORKS

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I beg to move amendment No. 116, in page 53, line 17, at end insert—

'( ) This section shall cease to have effect upon such day as the Secretary of State may appoint by order made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 117, in clause 149, page 86, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) This section shall cease to have effect upon such day as the Secretary of State may appoint by order made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

8.15 pm

Mr. Riddick: Hon. Members will not be surprised that I have tabled these two amendments, because I expressed some concern about clause 90 on Second Reading.

Clause 90 allows local authorities to carry out reinstatement work for the utility companies. I have discussed with some of my hon. Friends the desirability of dropping clause 90, but they pointed out that there would be certain practical difficulties with that and they felt that there should, at the very least, be a transitional period. I accept and hope that my amendments reflect those concerns. They would give the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Scotland the power to bring an order before Parliament ending the right of local authorities to carry out street works on behalf of the utility companies.

The Government are encouraging the trend that local authorities should be enabling rather than providing authorities. The Bill follows that pattern and effectively puts the onus on the utility companies to carry out reinstatement work, while turning the local highways department into enabling or, indeed, regulatory authorities. That is fine and I support that approach.

However, clause 90 then allows local authorities to tender for that same reinstatement work. A potential conflict of interest is immediately created. It is possible that less scrupulous local authorities will abuse that regulatory role, so as to encourage the utilities to give the work to their direct labour organisations. I smelt a rat on Second Reading when the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) congratulated the Government on including clause 90 in the Bill. It is not really surprising that Labour supports it, as it believes in public rather than private enterprise and in maintaining the power and employment of the members of the National Union of Public Employees within DLOs.

Having seen how some local authorities have gone out of their way to undermine competitive tendering in a number of fields to keep those functions in house, I fear that some of those authorities will abuse their new powers and will perhaps distort costings to submit artificially low tenders for reinstatement work under these arrangements simply to keep their DLOs in existence, to the disadvantage of local charge payers. The proof of that is already there for people to see. My local council, Kirklees, like many others, insists that it should carry out permanent reinstatement work on street works, as it is allowed to do under the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950, despite the fact that experience suggests that it is not wholly competent to do it. Potholes in Kirklees roads are proof of that, as is the fact that nearly £4 million remains unclaimed from the utilities for permanent reinstatement work, which the council should have carried out in the past four years but has failed to carry out.

By all means let the DLOs tender for reinstatement work, but let it be from the private sector, where they have to compete fairly and freely, without hidden subsidy.

I hope that my hon. Friends will accept my two amendments this evening and I suggest that it would be

sensible to lay out a clear timetable for the transition to the new arrangements and to state that those powers will be exercised, perhaps around the end of 1992.

I know that we want to make rapid progress with the Bill, and so I shall end my comments there. I hope that the Government will accept the amendments and I urge all my hon. Friends to support them.

Ms. Ruddock: The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) says that the House will not be surprised that he has tabled the amendments. I am extremely surprised. I remember the hon. Gentleman's Second Reading speech well, but, as he has consulted Ministers, it seems to me quite extraordinary that he should still table the amendments; they are quite unnecessary. It seems to me that he has tabled them simply to provide another opportunity to attack the local authority covering his constituency and the local authority workers.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Colne Valley is aware of what he is saying when he suggests that Kirklees council is not entirely competent to do reinstatement work. When he spoke on Second Reading he called British Gas in support of his speech. He talked about the fact that British Gas had problems with Kirklees council. I have information to the effect that Kirklees council has recently agreed a trial with British Gas in which Kirklees council will do British Gas reinstatements. If that trial is successful, Kirklees is likely to be asked to do that work on a permanent basis and that is in the light of this Bill's passage through the House.

Mr. Riddick: I am interested to hear what the hon. Lady has to say. All I know is that British Gas has a large sum of money held in an account waiting to be paid to Kirklees council, because the council has failed to carry out permanent reinstatement work, which it insists that it should do. We are not talking about a small amount of money—it is more than £1 million. I have talked to British Gas and I would be absolutely amazed if it puts its reinstatement work in the hands of Kirklees council. I am not suggesting that the DLO workers in Kirklees are not competent to do the work. If the hon. Lady had listened to my speech she would have heard me say that if they want to tender for the work that is fine, but they should do so from the private sector, and then there would be truly free and fair competition.

Mr. Ruddock: I fear that there is not an ounce of logic in what the hon. Gentleman has said. Clearly, British Gas —a private company—has experience of local government workers' reinstating holes, and it seems to have confidence in them. The hon. Gentleman should take the matter up with British Gas. Discussions appear to be in progress about using a local authority to do the work in the way envisaged in clause 90.

Mr. Riddick: When I tried to intervene on the hon. Lady on Second Reading she would not give way, although her speech ended two minutes before it need have done. Let me now ask the question that I wanted to ask then: will she urge the Kirklees councillors who oppose the Bill to accept its provisions?

Ms. Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman is straying very far from the point. The Bill is making progress; there is consensus between Opposition and Government. As I have said, we understand that Kirklees council is negotiating the possibility of carrying out such works as are envisaged in clause 90. The hon. Gentleman seems to have some ideological problem with the concept of public sector workers tendering for work. If he wants more public sector workers in his constituency to be unemployed, he should address that problem; certainly his electors will do so in due course.

Clause 90 was introduced by the Government in another place. It was amended slightly on Report: its scope was extended to cover district councils as well as street authorities. We understand that the Government intended to clarify the position of local authorities in regard to the undertaking of work for utilities. As such, that was an extremely modest amendment whose aim was simply to make it clear that there was no legal impediment to a utility's inviting an authority to tender for a contract to carry out work on behalf of that utility. How could such moderation cause such offence?

Clause 90 does not give local authorities the right to demand the ability to carry out a utility's work; it does not give them the right to demand to be included on that utility's tender list. In fact, it gives local authorities no new powers at all. It simply makes it clear that, if a utility wishes to employ a local authority to undertake work for it, it may do so.

The Horne report, on which this part of the Bill is based, identified weaknesses and poor performance on the part of both highway authorities and utilities. There is no dispute about that. The Bill and the consensus surrounding it are directed towards a dramatic improvement in street works nationwide.

A utility that was dissatisfied with a local authority's past performance would surely be highly unlikely to invite that authority to tender for its necessary works. The standard to be met will be exactly the same whether the work force is that of the utility, the local authority or any other contractor, private or public. No privilege will accrue to local authorities as a consequence of clause 90.

The amendment would enable the Secretary of State to set a date, by order, after which clause 90 would not apply. It is difficult to see the reasoning behind it. The clause will be relevant only for such time as utilities consider it helpful to them to be able to arrange for work to be undertaken by a local authority. If no utility makes such an arrangement, the clause will be irrelevant.

Surely it is best left to individual utilities, rather than the Secretary of State, to determine whether arrangements should be made with local authorities. Why should the Secretary of State seek to block such arrangements if utilities find that they represent an efficient, economic and effective means of meeting their responsibilities under the Bill?

It is important to bear in mind the extent to which this part of the Bill represents a package, with pluses and minuses for both local authorities and the utilities. Both sides have accepted that package as a whole, and are obviously keen to see its early implementation. For the local authority associations, clause 90 represents an integral part of the package. Its amendment in the way proposed would seriously undermine highway authorities' confidence in the package, at a time when their commitment is essential. The legislation provides the bones of a new system, but the flesh will be provided by co-operation between the utilities, the highway authorities and the Department. The Minister for Public Transport has played a central role in holding those three groups

[Ms. Ruddock]

together during the passage of the Bill. Trust and confidence are vital ingredients, which I believe the amendment would wholly destroy.

We hope that the Minister will resist the amendment, which is opposed not only by us but by the local authority associations and the utilities. It is entirely unnecessary and its acceptance would send an unhelpful signal to highway authorities at a time when their commitment to the new street works regime is essential to the securing of its speedy and successful implementation. I hope that, at this late stage, the Minister will not accept such a destructive amendment.

Mr. Simon Coombs: I support the amendment, but not for the reasons advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick)—or, indeed, for the reasons attributed to him by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock).

If clause 90 is not amended, I believe that a problem may arise for local authorities—not, perhaps, a legal problem, but a practical one none the less. Let us suppose that an undertaking sub-contracted works of reinstatement or repair to a direct labour organisation within the local authority. If that authority were at the same time the street authority, it might find itself having to take action against the undertaking for non-performance of the contract that it had sub-contracted to its own direct labour organisation.

That strikes me as an extremely unfortunate position; indeed, an almost impossible position, notwithstanding the provision in clause 90(3) that

"Nothing in this section shall be construed as derogating from any powers exercisable by the authority or council apart from this section."

The local authority would, of course, be expected to act properly in every respect, but it would be asking a great deal of any authority to expect it, when its own DLO had failed to deliver on a sub-contract, to embark on action that would inevitably involve the possibility of that DLO's being harshly punished.

Surely it would be better for all the parties concerned—especially, dare I say, the road user—for us to pass the amendments, and thereby avoid the risk that I have described. I hope that, if my hon. Friend the Minister shares my fear, he will accept them.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) referred to the clause on Second Reading, and I said then that I expected to be able to return to the subject in Committee. I recognised that clause 90 was effectively an exemption in regard to the principle contained in the local authority goods and services legislation, and emphasised that there was therefore a strong onus on its supporters to show that it was necessary.

Having considered clause 90 further, I think that it is necessary in order to facilitate an orderly transition from a regime in which local authority direct services organisations carry out almost all reinstatement work to a regime in which they will not do any. The power for local authorities to carry out private sector work should not be necessary beyond a point of transition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley has cleverly drafted an amendment that will enable the Government, after necessary consultation with the utilities and the local authorities, to say "We are now bringing this regime to an end and we shall carry on with the normal principles that apply", which, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) knows, are that local authorities do not tender or carry out work for the private sector.

8.30 pm

Things have moved on much since the Horne report, because now all utilities are in the private sector. The principle is whether it is right that local authority DSOs should carry out work for private sector organisations, or whether it should more properly be done in the private sector.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley about the principle that local authorities should be enablers rather than direct providers of service. That is even more important when local authorities are adopting a regulatory role—a point that was made cogently by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs).

I hope that the House will accept the amendments, which will make the Bill more flexible. They will enable the Government to introduce regulations to end the right of local authority DSOs to carry out private sector work. For the reasons that I gave, it would not be right to exclude clause 90 from the Bill, which is what my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley urged on Second Reading.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 130, Noes 38.

Division No. 152] **[8.31 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Fishburn, John Dudley
Amess, David	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Arbuthnot, James	Forth, Eric
Ashby, David	Fox, Sir Marcus
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Freeman, Roger
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Gale, Roger
Bellingham, Henry	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Goodlad, Alastair
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Gorst, John
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Gregory, Conal
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*	Hague, William
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Bowis, John	Hannam, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Haselhurst, Alan
Brazier, Julian	Hawkins, Christopher
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*	Hayward, Robert
Buck, Sir Antony	Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Butterfill, John	Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Carrington, Matthew	Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Cash, William	Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Chapman, Sydney	Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Chope, Christopher	Hunter, Andrew
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*	Irvine, Michael
Colvin, Michael	Jack, Michael
Conway, Derek	Jackson, Robert
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Jessel, Toby
Cope, Rt Hon John	Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Cran, James	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina	King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*	Kirkhope, Timothy
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	Knapman, Roger
Dorrell, Stephen	Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James	Knowles, Michael
Dover, Den	Knox, David
Dykes, Hugh	Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Fallon, Michael	Lord, Michael
Favell, Tony	MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Fenner, Dame Peggy	MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*

Maclean, David
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Dufly, A. E. P.
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Quin, Ms Joyce
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

New Clause 11

CHARGE FOR OCCUPATION OF THE ROAD WHERE WORKS UNREASONABLY PROLONGED

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may make provision by regulations requiring an undertaker executing road works in a public road to pay a charge to the roads authority where—

(a) the duration of the works exceeds such period as may be prescribed, and

(b) the works are not completed within a reasonable period.

(2) For this purpose "a reasonable period" means such period as is agreed by the authority and the undertaker to be reasonable or, in default of such agreement, is determined by arbitration to be reasonable, for completion of the works in question.

In default of agreement, the authority's view as to what is a reasonable period shall be acted upon pending the decision of the arbiter.

(3) The regulations may provide that if an undertaker has reason to believe that the duration of works will exceed the prescribed period he may submit to the authority an estimate of their likely duration—

(a) in the case of works in connection with the initial placing of apparatus in the road in pursuance of a permission granted under section 105 (permission to execute road works), together with his application for permission,

(b) in the case of other works (not being emergency works), together with his notice under section 110 (notice of starting date), or

(c) in the case of emergency works, as soon as reasonably practicable after the works are begun,

and that the period stated in an estimate so submitted shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(4) The regulations may also provide that if it appears to the undertaker that by reason of matters not previously foreseen or reasonably foreseeable the duration of the works—

(a) is likely to exceed the prescribed period,

(b) is likely to exceed the period stated in his previous estimate, or

(c) is likely to exceed the period previously agreed or determined to be a reasonable period,

he may submit an estimate or revised estimate accordingly, and that if he does so any previous estimate, agreement or determination shall cease to have effect and the period stated in the new estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(5) The amount of the charge shall be determined in such manner as may be prescribed by reference to the time taken to complete the works and the extent to which the surface of the road is affected by the works.

Different rates of charge may be prescribed according to the place and time at which the works are executed and such other factors as appear to the Secretary of State to be relevant.

(6) The regulations may make provision as to the time and manner of making payment of any charge.

(7) The regulations shall provide that a roads authority may reduce the amount, or waive payment, of a charge in any particular case, in such classes of case as they may decide or as may be prescribed, or generally.

(8) The first regulations for the purposes of this section shall not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament; subsequent regulations shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'. —*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 107

EMERGENCY WORKS

Amendment made: No. 81, in page 62, line 20 after 'imminent' insert

'(or which the person responsible for the works believes on reasonable grounds to be existing or imminent)'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 113

RESTRICTION ON WORKS FOLLOWING SUBSTANTIAL WORKS CARRIED OUT FOR ROAD PURPOSES.

Amendments made: No. 82, in page 65, line 17, leave out

'which consists of or includes a carriageway'.

No. 83, in page 65, leave out lines 20 to 28 and insert—

'For this purpose substantial works means works for road purposes, or such works together with other works, of such description as may be prescribed.'.

No. 84, in page 66, line 15, leave out

'(which shall not be unreasonably withheld)'.

No. 85, in page 66, line 22 at end insert—

'( ) The consent of the road works authority under subsection (5)(b) shall not be unreasonably withheld; and any question whether the withholding of consent is unreasonable shall be settled by arbitration.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 114

GENERAL DUTY OF ROAD WORKS AUTHORITY TO CO-ORDINATE WORKS.

Amendment made: No. 86, in page 66, line 39, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 115

GENERAL DUTY OF UNDERTAKERS TO CO-OPERATE

Amendment made: No 87, in page 67, line 23, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 116

PROTECTED ROADS

Amendments made: No. 88, in page 67, line 35, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

'( ) The consent of the road works authority is required for the placing of apparatus by an undertaker in a protected road, except as mentioned below.

The following are "protected roads" for this purpose—

(a) any road or proposed road which is a special road in accordance with section 7 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, and

(b) any road designated by the road works authority as protected.

( ) Consent is not required for the placing of apparatus—

(a) by way of renewal of existing apparatus, or

(b) in pursuance of a permission granted under section 105 of this Act (permission to execute road works) or section 61 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (permission to place and maintain apparatus under a road), except where the permission was granted before the road became a protected road.'.

No. 89, in page 68, line 8, leave out first 'the' and insert 'any'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Schedule 6

ROADS WITH SPECIAL ENGINEERING DIFFICULTIES

Amendment made: No. 90, in page 106, line 14, leave out 'or part of a road'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 124

WORKS LIKELY TO AFFECT OTHER APPARATUS IN THE ROAD

Amendment made: No. 91, in page 72, leave out lines 9 to 18 and insert

'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the person to whom the apparatus belongs reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by him which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the apparatus or for securing access to it.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 129

FEE FOR OCCUPATION OF A ROAD

Amendment made: No. 109, in page 75, line 20, leave out Clause 129.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 136

DUTY TO MAINTAIN APPARATUS

Amendments made: No. 92, in page 79, line 6, leave out 'safety, the' and insert 'the safety and'.

No. 93, in page 79, line 9, leave out 'in it' and insert 'of the authority in the road'.

No. 94, in page 79, line 18, leave out 'road, bridge or' and insert

'works for roads purposes, major bridge works or major'.

No. 95, in page 79, line 20, leave out subsections (3) aned (4) and insert—

'(3) If an undertaker fails to give a relevant authority the facilities required by this section—

(a) the road works authority may in such cases as may be prescribed, and

(b) any other relevant authority may in any case,

execute such works as are needed to enable them to inspect the apparatus in question, including any necessary breaking up or opening of the road.

(4) If an undertaker fails to secure that apparatus is maintained to the reasonable satisfaction of a relevant authority in accordance with this section—

(a) the road works authority may in such cases as may be prescribed, and

(b) any other relevant authority may in any case,

execute any emergency works needed in consequence of the failure.'.

No. 96, in page 79, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) Nothing in subsection (3) or (4) shall be construed as excluding any other means of securing compliance with the duties imposed by subsection (1).'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 137

LIABILITY FOR DAMAGE OR LOSS CAUSED

Amendments made: No. 97, in page 79, line 37, leave out from 'any' to ', and' and insert

'damage or loss suffered by the authority in their capacity as such'.

No. 98, in page 79, leave out lines 39 and 40 and insert 'expense reasonably incurred in making good damage to that apparatus'.

No. 99, in page 80, line 11, leave out 'authority' and insert 'person'.

No. 100, in page 80, line 14, leave out 'authority' and insert 'person'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 138

WORKS FOR ROAD PURPOSES LIKELY TO AFFECT APPARATUS IN THE ROAD.

Amendment made: No. 101, in page 80, leave out lines 25 to 34 and insert 'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the person to whom the apparatus belongs reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by him which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the apparatus or for securing access to it.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 140

SHARING OF COST OF NECESSARY MEASURES

Amendment made: No. 102, in page 81, line 31, leave out from 'undertaker' to 'make' in line 45 and insert 'in such manner as may be prescribed.

(2) The regulations may make provision as to the costs allowable for this purpose.

Provision may, in particular, be made for disallowing costs of the undertaker—

(a) where the apparatus in question was placed in the road after the authority had given the undertaker the prescribed notice of their intention to execute the works, or

(b) in respect of measures taken to remedy matters for which the authority were not to blame,

and for allowing only such costs of either party as are not recoverable from a third party.

(3) Where the authority have a right to recover from a third party their costs in taking measures in relation to undertaker's apparatus but in accordance with section 139 it is determined that the measures should be taken by the undertaker, the right of the authority includes a right to recover the undertaker's costs in taking those measures and they shall account to the undertaker for any sum received.

(4) The regulations shall provide for the allowable costs to be borne by the authority and the undertaker in such proportions as may be prescribed.

Different proportions may be prescribed for different cases or classes of case.

(5) The regulations may require the undertaker to give credit for any financial benefit to him from the betterment or deferment of renewal of the apparatus resulting from the measures taken.

(6) The regulations may'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 143

BRIDGES, BRIDGE AUTHORITIES AND RELATED MATTERS

Amendment made: No. 103, in page 83, leave out lines 22 to 33 and insert

'take all reasonably practicable steps—

(a) to give the bridge authority reasonable facilities for monitoring the execution of the works, and

(b) to comply with any requirement made by them which is reasonably necessary for the protection of the bridge or for securing access to it.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 147

SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS AS TO DISPLAYING OF LIGHTS

Amendment made: No. 104, in page 85, line 30, at end insert—

'( ) In proceedings for such an offence it is a defence for the undertaker to show that all reasonable care was taken by him, and by his contractors and by persons in his employ or that of his contractors, to secure that no such failure occurred.'. —*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 149

POWER OF ROAD WORKS AUTHORITY OR DISTRICT COUNCIL TO UNDERTAKE ROAD WORKS

Amendment proposed: No. 117, in page 86, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) This section shall cease to have effect upon such day as the Secretary of State may appoint by order made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'. —*[Mr. Riddick.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 122, Noes 25.

Division No. 153] **[8.43 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Fearn, Ronald
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Haynes, Frank
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McMaster, Gordon
Meale, Alan

Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, Dave
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Robert Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Schedule 8

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 66, in page 111, leave out lines 18 to 47 and insert—

"*Builders' skips: charge for occupation of highway*

140A.—(1) The Minister may make provision by regulations requiring the owner of a builder's skip deposited on a highway maintainable at the public expense to pay a charge to the highway authority where—

(a) the period for which the skip remains in the highway exceeds such period as may be prescribed, and

(b) the skip is not removed within a reasonable period.

(2) For this purpose "a reasonable period" means such period as is agreed by the authority and the owner of the skip to be reasonable or, in default of such agreement, is determined by arbitration to be reasonable in the circumstances.

In default of agreement, the authority's view as to what is a reasonable period shall be acted upon pending the decision of the arbitrator.

(3) The regulations may provide that if a person applying to the highway authority for permission under section 139 above submits together with his application an estimate of the likely duration of the occupation of the highway, the period stated in the estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(4) The regulations may also provide that if it appears to the owner of the skip that by reason of matters not previously foreseen or reasonably foreseeable the duration of the occupation of the highway—

(a) is likely to exceed the prescribed period,

(b) is likely to exceed the period stated in his previous estimate, or

(c) is likely to exceed the period previously agreed or determined to be a reasonable period,

he may submit an estimate or revised estimate accordingly, and that if he does so any previous estimate, agreement or determination shall cease to have effect and the period stated in the new estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(5) The amount of the charge shall be determined in such manner as may be prescribed by reference to the period for which the highway is occupied by the skip and the extent of the occupation.

Different rates of charge may be prescribed according to the place and time of the occupation and such other factors as appear to the Minister to be relevant.

(6) The regulations may make provision as to the time and manner of making payment of any charge.

(7) The regulations shall provide that a highway authority may reduce the amount, or waive payment, of a charge in any particular case, in such classes of case as they may decide or as may be prescribed, or generally.

(8) In this section "prescribed" means prescribed by the Minister by regulations.".

No. 67, in page 112, leave out lines 14 to 49 and insert—

'"*Works under s. 169 or s. 171: charge for occupation of the highway.*

171A.—(1) The Minister may make provision by regulations requiring a person carrying out any of the following works in a highway maintainable at the public expense

(a) erecting or retaining a relevant structure within the meaning of section 169(1) above, or

(b) depositing building materials, rubbish or other things, or making a temporary excavation, as mentioned in section 171(1) above,

to pay a charge to the highway authority if the duration of the works exceeds such period as may be prescribed and the works are not completed within a reasonable period.

(2) For this purpose "a reasonable period" means such period as is agreed by the authority and the person executing the works to be reasonable or, in default of such agreement, is determined by arbitration to be reasonable in the circumstances.

In default of agreement, the authority's view as to what is a reasonable period shall be acted upon pending the decision of the arbitrator.

(3) The regulations may provide that if a person applying to the highway authority for a licence under section 169 or consent under section 171 submits together with his application an estimate of the likely duration of the works, the period stated in the estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(4) The regulations may also provide that if it appears to the person carrying out the works that by reason of matters not previously foreseen or reasonably foreseeable the duration of the works—

(a) is likely to exceed the prescribed period,

(b) is likely to exceed the period stated in his previous estimate, or

(c) is likely to exceed the period previously agreed or determined to be a reasonable period,

he may submit an estimate or revised estimate accordingly, and that if he does so any previous estimate, agreement or determination shall cease to have effect and the period stated in the new estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(5) The amount of the charge shall be determined in such manner as may be prescribed by reference to the time taken to complete the works and the extent to which the surface of the highway is affected by the works.

Different rates of charge may be prescribed according to the description of works, the place and time at which they are executed and such other factors as appear to the Minister to be relevant.

(6) The regulations may make provision as to the time and manner of making payment of any charge.

(7) The regulations shall provide that a highway authority may reduce the amount, or waive payment, of a charge in any particular case, in such classes of case as they may decide or as may be prescribed, or generally.

(8) In this section "prescribed" means prescribed by the Minister by regulations.".'.

No. 68, in page 113, line 14, at end insert—

'; and in subsection (15) (supplementary provision as to costs recoverable by highway authority), for "the cost of any works which are required by the said Act of 1950 to be executed" substitute "the cost of any measures needing to be taken in relation to undertaker's apparatus, in accordance with section 80 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991,".'.

No. 69, in page 113, line 45, leave out from 'containing' to 'shall' in line 47 and insert '—

(a) the first regulations for the purposes of section 140A,

(b) the first regulations for the purposes of section 171A as it applies in relation to erecting or retaining a relevant structure within the meaning of section 169(1) above, or

(c) the first regulations for the purposes of section 171A as it applies in relation to depositing building

materials, rubbish or other things, or making a temporary excavation, as mentioned in section 171(1) above,'.

No. 15, in page 118, line 19, leave out 'the' and insert 'any'.

No. 16, in page 123, line 46, leave out paragraph 61 and insert—

'61. In section 84 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (speed limits on roads other than restricted roads), for subsection (2) (authority having power to make order) substitute—

"(2) The power to make an order under subsection (1) is exercisable by the traffic authority, who shall before exercising it in any case give public notice of their intention to do so.".'.

No. 110, in page 128, line 26, leave out from beginning to end of line 18 on page 129 and insert—

'Charge for occupation of road

61A.—(1) The Secretary of State may make provision by regulations requiring a person who occupies a public road by doing anything to which this section applies to pay a charge to the roads authority if the duration of the occupation exceeds the longer of the following periods—

(a) such period as may be prescribed; or

(b) such period as is agreed by the authority and the person to be reasonable or, in default of such agreement, is determined by arbitration to be reasonable in the circumstances.

(2) This section applies to the occupation of a public road by doing anything which would require the consent or permission of a roads authority under any of the following provisions of this Act—

section 56 (works executed in or excavations under a public road);

section 58 (occupation of road for deposit of building materials and erection of scaffolding);

section 59 (placing or depositing anything in a road);

section 61 (placing, leaving, retaining, maintaining, repairing and reinstating apparatus in or under a public road); or

section 85 (depositing a builders' skip).

(3) For the purposes of paragraph (b) of subsection (1) above, in default of agreement, the roads authority's view as to what is a reasonable period shall be acted upon pending the decision of the arbiter.

(4) The regulations may provide that if a person applying to the roads authority for consent or permission under any of the provisions of this Act specified in subsection (2) above submits together with his application an estimate of the likely duration of the occupation, the period stated in the estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(5) The regulations may provide that if it appears to the person occupying the road that by reason of matters not previously foreseen or reasonably foreseeable the duration of the occupation—

(a) is likely to exceed the prescribed period,

(b) is likely to exceed the period stated in the previous estimate, or

(c) is likely to exceed the period previously agreed or determined to be a reasonable period,

he may submit an estimate or revised estimate accordingly, and that if he does so any previous estimate, agreement or determination shall cease to have effect and the period stated in the new estimate shall be taken to be agreed by the roads authority to be reasonable unless they give notice, in such manner and within such period as may be prescribed, objecting to the estimate.

(6) The amount of the charge shall be determined in such manner as may be prescribed by reference to the duration and extent of the occupation and different rates of charge may be prescribed according to the purpose of the occupation and such other factors as appear to the Secretary of State to be relevant.

(7) The regulations may make provision as to the time and manner of making payment of any charge.

(8) The regulations shall provide that a roads authority may reduce the amount, or waive payment, of a charge in any particular case, in such classes of case as they may decide or as may be prescribed, or generally.

(9) In this section "prescribed" means prescribed by the Secretary of State by regulations.'.

No. 105, in page 130, line 30, at end insert—

'(3) Where it is intended that the proposed toll order shall authorise the special road authority to assign their rights to charge and collect tolls, the Secretary of State or, as the case may be, the local roads authority shall make a statement containing such information as may be prescribed with respect to that assignation and the person to whom the rights are intended to be assigned and—

(a) the statement shall be made available for inspection with the copy of the order to which the notice under subparagraph (1) or (2) relates; and

(b) the notice shall state that such a statement will be so available.

(4) In sub-paragraph (3) "prescribed" means prescribed by the Secretary of State by regulations made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 111, in page 130, line 43, at end insert—

'14D.—(1) A toll order shall be subject to special parliamentary procedure where—

(a) the relevant special road scheme provides for the appropriation by or transfer to the special road authority of an existing public road comprised in the route prescribed by the scheme, and

(b) the toll order authorises the charging of tolls for the use of that existing road or any part of it,

unless the Secretary of State is satisfied as regards all classes of traffic entitled to use the existing road that another reasonably convenient route free of toll is available, or will be provided before the date on which the appropriation or transfer takes effect, and certifies accordingly.

(2) Where the Secretary of State proposes to give such a certificate, he shall—

(a) give public notice of his intention to do so,

(b) afford an opportunity to all persons interested to make representations and objections, and

(c) cause a public local inquiry to be held if it appears to him to be expedient to do so, having regard to representations or objections made,

and before deciding whether to give the certificate he shall consider any representations and objections made and, if an inquiry has been held, the report of the person who held the inquiry.

(3) As soon as may be after giving a certificate, the Secretary of State shall publish in the Edinburgh Gazette, and in such other manner as he thinks best for informing persons affected, a notice stating that the certificate has been given.'.

No. 112, in page 130, line 44, leave out '14D" and insert '14E'.

No. 113, in page 130, line 47, at end insert—

'(3) In paragraph 19 of that Schedule—

(a) in sub-paragraph (a), after "1" insert "or 14A";

(b) in sub-paragraph (b), after "above" there shall be inserted the words "or held under paragraph 14B above"; and

(c) in sub-paragraph (c), for the words "and 13" there shall be substituted the words ", 13 and 14C".'.

No. 114, in page 130, line 47, at end insert—

'. At the end of Schedule 2 to the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (validity and date of operation of certain orders and schemes), the following paragraph shall be inserted—

"6. The provisions of paragraphs 2 to 4 above apply in relation to a certificate under paragraph 14D(1) of Schedule 1 to this Act as in relation to a scheme or order to which this Schedule applies, subject to the following modifications—

(a) the reference in paragraph 2 above to the notice required by paragraph 1 above shall be construed as a reference to the notice required by paragraph 14D(3) of that Schedule, and

(b) in paragraph 4 above for the words 'made or confirmed' there shall be substituted the word 'given' and the words from 'and shall become operative' to the end shall be omitted.".'.

No. 17, in page 131, line 2, at end insert—

'Roads Act 1920 (c.72)

. In section 10 of the Roads Act 1920 (powers of Secretary of State in relation to charges for use of vehicles on roads), at the end insert—

"Nothing in this section applies to any sum payable by virtue of Part I or II of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.".'.

No. 18, in page 131, line 3, leave out paragraph 97 and insert—

'Fire Services Act 1947 (c.41)

.—(1) The Fire Services Act 1947 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3(2) (supplementary powers of fire authorities; provisions as to exercise of power to place fire alarms in public places), for the words from the beginning to "maintaining the road;" or, in Scotland, "of the roads authority;" substitute—

"(2) Before exercising the powers conferred by subsection (1)(c) above in relation to a highway for which they are not the highway authority or, in Scotland, a public road for which they are not the roads authority, a fire authority shall obtain the consent of the highway or roads authority;".

(3) In section 38(1) (interpretation)—

(a) at the appropriate place insert—

"'highway authority' has the same meaning as in the Highways Act 1980;";

and

(b) in the definition of "road" for the words "Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950" substitute "Part IV of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991".'.

No. 106, in page 133, line 10, at end insert—

'New Towns (Scotland) Act 1968 (c.16)

. In section 8 of the New Towns (Scotland) Act 1968 (acquisition of land for roads in connection with new towns), in subsection (2) for "a trunk road" substitute "a road for which he is the roads authority".'.

No. 107, in page 133, line 21 after '(lines)' insert ' —

(a) for the words "road, other than a trunk road" substitute "a road for which the Secretary of State is not the roads authority"; and

(b) '.

No. 19, in page 133, line 42, at end insert—

'Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 (c.75)

. In Schedule 3 to the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 (the new towns code)—

(a) in paragraph 1(4)(c) for "a trunk road" substitute "a road for which the Secretary of State is the highway authority", and

(b) in paragraph 2(2) for "a trunk road" substitute "a road for which he is the highway authority".'.

No. 20, in page 135, line 17, at end insert—

'New Towns Act 1981 (c.64)

. In section 11 of the New Towns Act 1981 (acquisition of land for highways), in subsection (2)(a) (powers of Secretary of State) for "a trunk road" substitute "a road for which he is the highway authority".'.

No. 70, in page 136, line 10, leave out '"upon,"' and insert '"in, on,".'.

No. 21, in page 136, line 29, at end insert—

'Transport Act 1985 (c.67)

.—(1) The Transport Act 1985 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 7(12) (application of traffic regulation conditions to local bus services; requirement of consent of Secretary of State) for "a trunk road" substitute "a road for which the Secretary of State is the highway or roads authority".

(3) In section 137(1) (interpretation), omit the definition of "trunk road".'.

No. 22, in page 136, line 31, leave out from beginning to 'for' in line 32 and insert—

'112.—(1) Section 62 of the Airports Act 1986 (provisions as to telecommunications apparatus) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) (cases in which highway authority or owner of subsoil may require alteration of apparatus), for paragraph (b) substitute—

"(b) for the improvement of the highway where the Secretary of State is not the highway authority,".

(3) In subsection (4) (limit on effect of subsection (2)(b),'.

No. 23, in page 137, line 22, at end insert—

'Road Traffic Act 1988 (c.52)

.—(1) The Road Traffic Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 22A(3)(c)(i), omit the words "section 8 of the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950".

(3) In section 39 (provisions with respect to road safety)—

(a) in subsection (3)(a) (duty of local authority as to study of road accidents), for "trunk roads" substitute "roads for which the Secretary of State is the highway authority (in Scotland, roads authority)";

(b) in subsection (3)(b) (duties as to taking of measures in light of studies), for "roads for which they are the highway authority (in Scotland, local roads authority)" substitute "roads for the maintenance of which they are responsible".

(4) In section 192(1) (general interpretation), for the definition of "highway authority" substitute—

"'highway authority', in England and Wales, means—

(a) in relation to a road for which he is the highway authority within the meaning of the Highways Act 1980, the Secretary of State, and

(b) in relation to any other road, the council of the county, metropolitan district or London borough, or the Common Council of the City of London, as the case may be;".'.

No. 24, in page 138, line 31, leave out from beginning to 'for' in line 32 and insert—

'119.—(1) Section 256 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (provisions as to telecommunications apparatus) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3) (power of local highway authority to require alteration of apparatus) for "highway, other than a trunk road" substitute "highway for which the Secretary of State is not the highway authority".

(3) In subsection (4) (limitation of power under subsection (3))'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Schedule 9

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 141, line 36, at end insert—

'1985 c. 67.	Transport Act 1985.	In section 137(1), the definition of "trunk road".

No. 26, in page 141, line 40, at end insert—

'1988 c. 52.	Road Traffic Act 1988.	In section 22A(3)(c)(i), the words "section 8 of the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950".'.— *[Mr. Freeman.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified].

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

8.54 pm

Ms. Ruddock: I do not propose to detain the House for long. However, I want to place on the record the stage that we have reached in this Third Reading. We remain fundamentally and implacably opposed to the private toll road programme, and we do not intend to implement that programme when we are in government—something that we expect to happen soon.

However, we are grateful to the Minister for having taken account of the many amendments and new clauses that we and others tabled in Committee. They have brought the procedures for private toll roads—should they ever be used—into a better form. There will be more accountability and more reporting in the public arena. More justice and fairness will be brought to bear on that procedure should it ever be used.

I recall the comments made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). Clearly it is to the detriment of the people of Skye that the only opportunity for their island to be joined to the mainland lies in the procedures in this legislation. It is our wish and it is undoubtedly theirs that they should have that modern infrastructure provided without recourse to a privately built and tolled road.

There was much greater harmony on the second half of the Bill. The consensus has been reached after many years of hard work by the civil servants in the Department of Transport in meeting constantly, listening to and taking advice from representatives of the local authority associations and the utilities who, in their turn, have provided Opposition Members with much important information and assistance in drafting amendments which at their behest we tried to use to improve the Bill.

I am glad to say that part II of the Bill has been substantially improved. We now know that we have perhaps the best possible regime in terms of improving the quality and speed with which street works are undertaken in this country. Poorly executed street works have been and are a major danger to pedestrians, cyclists and those who drive cars and public service vehicles. They are all inconvenienced, and there is often huge congestion and a variety of problems which the Bill seeks to end. We are glad about that, and we had hoped to conclude tonight's proceedings with real harmony.

Unhappily, that harmony was ended by Government support for a completely unnecessary amendment that has removed from local authorities the possibility of their undertaking street works on behalf of the utilities. That measure was not only completely unnecessary but unwarranted. It suggests that local authorities and their direct labour organisations are not worthy of holding contracts for that work. We cannot agree with that measure and, in government, will not implement it.

I thank the Ministers for the co-operation that has been afforded to us, for notes during our proceedings, and for the meetings that the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) offered us, which we were glad to have.

The Bill will now provide for immense improvements for safety and convenience on our highways. For that we are most grateful. However, we remain opposed to private building and to toll roads funding, as mentioned in parts I and II, in any part of England and Wales and particularly in Scotland, with reference to the Skye road bridge. We expect to be in government before too long. We will not allow those private toll roads to be built.

8.59 pm

Mr. Fearn: I also welcome the Bill. Unfortunately, in Committee and on Second Reading, the Minister did not accept that the skill of management of Government has been used to bring two parts of the Bill together—one popular and one unpopular. The unpopular part relates to toll roads, with which we agree in principle, but which has many environmental problems. The second part of the Bill, which relates to street works, was agreed by most hon. Members, and very little controversy arose. We certainly now have a Bill that considers most people, but perhaps it should consider motor cyclists and cyclists even more.

With those few words, I hope that the Bill has a speedy passage and is on the statute book before long.

9 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I join in congratulating both sides of the House on getting at least the agreed parts of the Bill into good order. I also congratulate those who worked on the Horne committee and those who worked in the National Joint Utilities group for many years—rather more years than they would have wished. It is quite clear that this measure will lead to greater efficiency, effectiveness and economy. In time, many people should see the benefits of it.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock). The idea of direct labour organisations would be greeted with horror in the London borough of Greenwich, where my constituency is. On inspection, it turned out that the direct service organisation, the equivalent of what the hon. Lady was talking about, managed to make not a 5 per cent. return on capital, which is demanded of it, but a loss of 186 per cent. That £2 million loss a year would have been £3 million without drastic management action.

Such a loss cannot be afforded by the highway authorities which look after 96 per cent. of our roads. It is important that we try to achieve cost-effectiveness in carrying out work as well as a system that works.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bottomley: I do not want to give way to the hon. Lady, as it may lead to a debate that perhaps should have taken place earlier.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Bottomley: I shall give way if the hon. Lady insists.

Ms. Ruddock: I am sorry to insist, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was here when we debated the clause to which I referred and in respect of which disharmony occurred. I said that the amendment was

[Ms. Ruddock]

unnecessary. The clause allows only the possibility of a local authority tendering for work. It did not in any way give any benefit to a local authority, other than saying that it was not prohibited from being involved. The hon. Gentleman's points bear no relevance to the debate on clause 90 and the amendment to it.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Lady does not understand how much I know about national and local arrangements. Greenwich has acted as agent for the Department. If Greenwich was able to act as an agent for utilities as well, and if it was able to conceal its losses so that nursery classes, pavements, libraries and swimming pools went, to take the £2 million out of the accounts because it lost on its road works and white line painting, I am fully justified in making my remarks. If the hon. Lady refers to my remarks when the *Official Report* is published, she might tell other Labour authorities that we cannot afford their inefficiencies.

The street works proposal is very important. I hope that we shall see vast improvements so that all those who use our roads, whether on foot or on wheels, benefit.

9.3 pm

Mr. Haynes: It is a great pleasure to follow an ex-Transport Minister. He is talking differently from how he talked when he was at the Dispatch Box. He has changed his quarter or his corner, has the hon. Gentleman. I do not agree with him at all. I used to agree with him sometimes in the early hours of the morning. He used to bring orders in the early hours of the morning and keep us out of bed, but we were interested in transport, and road safety in particular.

Here we go again. The Government are at it again. They do not like the public sector but they love the private sector, because of the profit motive.

I believe that local authorities have done a marvellous job over the years, so why should they be criticised? The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) criticised his local authority a few moments ago—the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) was not even here.

Mr. Riddick: His council's incompetence is even greater than my council's incompetence.

Mr. Haynes: I have really done it now.

Mr. Riddick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Haynes: No. Sit down. I have not finished what I was saying. I may not be in the Chair, but I have the Floor. I did not realise that I would get the hon. Members for Eltham and for Colne Valley at each other's throats. The hon. Member for Colne Valley has the opportunity to make a speech, if he wants to criticise a former Transport Minister. The hon. Gentlemen are arguing between themselves when they have not even been called from the Chair.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): They are trying to wind you up.

Mr. Haynes: I do not want any sarcasm from Selly Oak, either. The hon. Gentleman will get awkward in a minute or two, and we will have to deal with him. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Gentleman may laugh, but he will be dealt with.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I surrender.

Mr. Haynes: I think that the hon. Gentleman should surrender now, and go. We do not want any difficulty after the debate.

When the hon. Member for Colne Valley spoke to an earlier amendment, I could not help intervening. As I said then, I am a cyclist. I like cycling. We spend so much time in this place sitting down, and people need exercise. Many Members go to the gymnasium to exercise, but I exercise on my bike. Many a night when we have knocked off at the House late at night or in the early hours of the morning, I have passed you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, going to your London residence. I am on my bicycle trying to keep an eye on you, and on the road, and on the traffic. That is difficult in this area of Westminster.

I do not cycle very far: I am only 15 minutes away—15 wonderful minutes on my bicycle—but that is enough for me to know how appalling the road conditions are round here. Yet Ministers from the Prime Minister downwards stand at the Dispatch Box bragging about Wandsworth and Westminster and all the things they do so cheaply. I know that Westminster council does things cheaply, because I have to cycle along dodging potholes in the blinking road, with traffic all over the damn place, and I have to watch where I am going. It is very difficult.

Back home, we have a first-class local authority. I am glad that the Secretary of State for Transport is listening, so that I can tell him that my local county council does a first-class job looking after the roads. If it spends a little too much, it is criticised, but the money is spent in the interests of road safety, in consultation with many organisations, including the police. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) knows about the consultation that takes place about roads.

A marvellous ring road was built in my constituency, with a cycle track. That is what the Government ought to encourage. Ministers often tell us that people should cycle more, and if they did so, more Raleigh cycles from Nottingham would be sold. That would be good for business and for the people who rode the cycles. But we need proper facilities to be able to cycle.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) mentioned motor cyclists. Motor cycling is another aspect of cycling. My county council puts a cycle track beside its new roads. I wish that Ministers would order all county councils to do the same; then we might get somewhere. There are far too many cars on the road.

Not all that long ago, I was lucky enough to be in China. I heard the arguments about the Hong Kong business, the airport and the roads to the new airport. I saw many people cycling. They were as fit as fiddles. They could work any number of hours because they were fit from cycling. We ought to encourage more and more people to cycle in Britain, because we need facilities for cyclists.

I should like to see the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) on a bicycle. If he had been on a bicycle, that rottweiler probably would not have attacked him. I was sorry for the hon. Gentleman when it happened, but at the same time I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) when he wanted to know if the dog was all right.

I have said my piece. I hope that the Treasury Bench —*[Interruption.]* I do not know why the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh,

West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), is laughing. It is a serious matter. I hope that the Scottish Minister has taken what I have said on board, because they cycle up in Scotland. We should provide proper facilities. I beg the Treasury Bench to do something about the problem and to order local authorities, when they plan to extend major roads and ring roads, to include proper facilities for cyclists.

I plead on behalf of cyclists because there are a lot of us. Many organisations support cyclists. I hope that the Treasury Bench will do so. I do not need to say any more. I have made my appeal in the hope that at least the Government have listened.

9.11 pm

Mr. Bowis: Before I ask the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) for a lift home on the back of his bike, I wish the Bill well, with two brief comments. The first is on part I. In Committee, we spent a great deal of time talking about the environment. I wish the Bill well in the hope that it will provide an opportunity for the environment. Environmental groups may in future be able to advance their own ideas for a private road into which they put their own resources to avoid some of the problems that they have come across. I am thinking of Twyford Down and other places where there could be a real opportunity for the future.

My second comment is on part II. I welcome the opportunity that it will give to my constituents and other people in the inner cities who have sat in traffic jams behind road works or had problems in walking along the pavements, or whose cycle has become stuck in a rut caused by road works. Those problems will be put right. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman). He has steered the Bill through often by coming to see a problem. Having seen it, he has often come back with a solution.

9.12 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs: I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) by congratulating and thanking my hon. Friend the Minister, who has steered the Bill through with understanding and concern. We had some excellent debates on road safety in Committee. I hope that all those involved will accept the importance attached by all those who served on the Committee and by other hon. Members to enhancing road safety through some of the measures in the Bill.

The Bill should be good for road users. For those who drive motor cars, there should be fewer humps and hollows to impede their progress and destroy their cars. For cyclists, there should be greater safety, not just because the surface of the roads will be improved. Some of the changes made in Committee will improve the chances that cyclists will find their way unimpeded. There are also benefits for pedestrians. Which of us has not had letters from pedestrians in our constituencies who have fallen down holes in the road or tripped over uneven pavements created by the poor quality of reinstatement of street works in the past?

All the people whom I have mentioned should benefit from the Bill, and I hope that they will do so. I also welcome parts I and II of the Bill. They provide an opportunity for a new capital input into road building in Britain. That should generate better traffic flow in parts of the country where it is badly needed and therefore help to generate greater prosperity and assist industries which depend on the movement of goods by road for their well-being.

I agree also with what has been said in this short Third Reading debate about the importance of ensuring that those responsible for new roads—indeed, all roads—take properly into account the need to preserve the environment, whenever and wherever that is possible.

Before my hon. Friend concludes this brief debate, may I ask him to tell the House when he expects the new regime introduced by the Bill to come into force. Many people will want to know the answer to that question. They are looking forward to the day when our labours on the Bill are brought to fruition. I have no doubt that it will greatly benefit all the people of this country.

9.14 pm

Mr. Freeman: I thank the members of the Committee for their very hard work in Committee. This is a workmanlike Bill. I also thank the officials and those outside Parliament who—rightly, constitutionally and perfectly properly—lobbied for and against the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) played a leading role, in terms of the second part of the Bill, in accepting on behalf of the Government the Horne committee's recommendations. Both he and the whole House will now see those provisions on the statute book—I hope very shortly. For those who use our roads and highways, it will mean both safer and more expeditious use of carriageways and footways.

There is a sharp difference of opinion between the Opposition Front Bench and the Government on toll roads. We shall bring into force the toll road provisions as quickly as possible, as well as the other provisions dealing with street works. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) gave notice that the Opposition would not bring into effect parts I and II by cancelling projects such as the Skye bridge, the Birmingham northern relief road and the western orbital road. That is the implication of what the Opposition propose to do. Either they will have to increase taxation to pay for those projects or they will have to cancel other parts of the road programme.

I commend the Bill to the House. I know that, apart from those legitimate areas of political discord, it does a service to the people of this country. Parliament has done its work well.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Seat Belts

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts in Rear Seats by Adults) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 2nd May, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

County Courts

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft County Court Remedies Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 3rd May, be approved. —*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Veterinary Surgeons

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Broadcasting

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 8th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Members (Resettlement Grant)

9.17 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That in the opinion of this House, on the dissolution of the present or any future Parliament—

(1) A grant should be payable to any person who is a Member of this House immediately before the dissolution and at the general election consequent upon the dissolution either does not stand for election to this House or, if he does, is not elected.

(2) The amount of the grant in the case of any such person should be equal to the relevant percentage of a year's salary at the highest rate payable to Members of this House immediately before the dissolution, the relevant percentage for this purpose being that shown in the following Table in relation to—

(a) his age at the dissolution; and

(b) the number of years for which he has served as a Member of this House before the dissolution.

Table
Percentages of Yearly Salary

	Number of years of service						
Age	*Under 10*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15 or over*
Under 50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
50	50	50	52	54	56	58	60
51	50	52	55	58	62	65	68
52	50	54	58	63	67	72	76
53	50	56	62	67	73	78	84
54	50	58	65	72	78	85	92
55 to 64	50	60	68	76	84	92	100
65	50	58	65	72	78	85	92
66	50	56	62	67	73	78	84
67	50	54	58	63	67	72	76
68	50	52	55	58	62	65	68
69	50	50	52	54	56	58	60
70 or over	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

(3) In calculating for the purposes of paragraph (2) the number of years for which a person has served as a Member of this House before the dissolution, there should be disregarded—

(a) any fraction of a year for which he has so served; and

(b) if a grant was payable to him under this Resolution or any of the former resettlement grant Resolutions on any previous occasion, any period of service which was taken into account or disregarded on that occasion;

and in this paragraph 'the former resettlement grant Resolutions' means the second Resolution of 20th December 1971, the fourth Resolution of 4th March 1980 and the third Resolution of 19th July 1983.

We had a full debate on resettlement grants for older Members of Parliament on 31 January. I agreed then to put the issue to the Top Salaries Review Body. The motion before the House implements in full the proposals contained in the TSRB report that was made available to the House on 29 April. Since then I have found widespread acceptance of the TSRB's recommendations. I am sure that the whole House will wish me to place on record our gratitude to the chairman and members of the TSRB, both for the speed with which they responded and for the skill with which they have addressed the issue. I believe, therefore, that we have been able to meet very speedily the clear wishes of the House, as expressed both in an early-day motion and in the debate on 31 January. I commend the motion to the House.

9.18 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): May I, on behalf of the Opposition, say that we support the motion and the decision of the Top Salaries Review Body. After extensive consultation, we believe that it has made a positive and reasonable proposal that will be in the interests of many Members of Parliament. It will be within the recollection of hon. Members that previous proposals covered deceased Members of Parliament and their families—younger Members of Parliament benefited from the

changes that the Government introduced, with our support. This is a limited but positive step forward. On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome the proposals.

9.19 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Top Salaries Review Body arrives at some incredible proposals for hon. Members and I do not welcome the proposal for a grant in the same way as some people. I have managed to scratch a few bob together and at this stage I am not concerned about my interest in the matter.

A Member of Parliament who loses his seat, especially in his earlier years, faces real problems. Judges can retire on a full pension after 15 years because people think that they come to that job late in life. For the sake of the country, God forbid that we should get many 25-year-old hon. Members, who have done nothing before coming to this talking shop. Such people would have to be in the House for 33 years before qualifying for a full pension, and that is entirely wrong.

My argument follows the line of what an MP should do. The most unemployable person in the world is an ex-MP who entered the House at the age of 25 or 30 and lost his seat after 15 years. Give or take a few bob, he will receive £15,000 under the current resettlement process. I do not object to changing the system for the golden oldies. Someone of 70 who leaves this place full of years and honour and, I hope, full of pension will get exactly the same, £15,000, as someone under the age of 50.

A miner, an office worker or a worker in heavy steel can leave his job at 30 and become an MP. If he loses his seat he can go back to his former job and start again. When I was senior partner in my business 12 years ago I prided myself on the fact that I could do every job in my office. Now I am a consultant in that business and, because of mechanisation in the office, there is no way that I could run that business in the way that I did 12 years ago. Things move on and that applies to office and manual jobs.

An ex-Chancellor, an ex-Prime Minister or an ex-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry can sell our secrets and themselves for huge sums or they can sell their memoirs or get jobs in banks. They are all right, but the ordinary infantry, the Back Bencher, is what Parliament is all about. It is not about those who hold great office. They are part of the system, but the Back Bencher is part of the freedom of Parliament. If he has a family, a person of 50 is at the most expensive time of his life. He may still be paying off a mortgage or have kids at school and, even if they are not at fee-paying schools, we all know what children cost. He does not pay for a holiday just for Mutt and Jeff; he has to pay for four or five people. To lose one's seat at a time of such expenses is no laughing matter. *[Interruption.]* I welcome some of the proposed money going to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). I know that hon. Members are keen to get away, but this is a serious issue. I have no genuine interest to declare except that I want to encourage people to come to this place, not just to seek high office but to play the insecure role of Back Benchers. This is an insecure job and if anyone thinks that those who leave here are highly desirable, he does not know some hon. Members as I know them. Some have fallen on very difficult times and the idea that they must go to a charity commission, which, I have no doubt, looks upon them kindly, is wrong.

I am not saying that hon. Members should be paid much more per se, but if they stick to their guns and stick by an honourable attitude to the job of a Back-Bench Member of Parliament or if they lose their seat or feel honour-bound to leave the House, they should not find themselves in such a ghastly disadvantaged position.

I do not think that people would begrudge the idea that the younger Members of Parliament—those under 55—should be dealt with more fairly. I know that some people have done their best with this resolution, but what they have done is typical of the civil servant top salary review cosy position. They have considered what they thought right, but they should consider what a Member of Parliament's job is. Members of Parliament should possibly be honoured more in the leaving than when they are here.

Hon. Members are not always equal—some have safe seats where the votes are weighed, not counted, and some have seats with small majorities, so it is a roulette wheel. I urge the House to consider the type of people that we need. We need those who are willing to stand up for principles and to take enough risks to come here in the first place. The resolution does nothing towards that. It helps those who are older, which is a good thing, but it does damn all for the younger hon. Member. Although we honour those going into the sunset, the sunrise of Parliament lies with the young, not with the retiring.

9.26 pm

Mr. MacGregor: The short answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) is that we are not making changes to the existing system of resettlement grants for those leaving at a general election and who are under 65 because no one suggested that in the debate on 31 January. There were no complaints at that time, but general approval of the system.

The early-day motion showed that the concern arose for those over 65 and for the anomalies. That is why that issue was put to the Top Salaries Review Body. In paragraphs 6 and 9 of its report it makes clear the reasons why it believes that a change should be made in the form of the resolution. As the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) said, it is a comparatively narrow point but one about which many hon. Members felt strongly. It is dealt with very well by the TSRB, and I commend the resolution to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That in the opinion of this House, on the dissolution of the present or any future Parliament—

(1) A grant should be payable to any person who is a Member of this House immediately before the dissolution and at the general election consequent upon the dissolution either does not stand for election to this House or, if he does, is not elected.

(2) The amount of the grant in the case of any such person should be equal to the relevant percentage of a year's salary at the highest rate payable to Members of this House immediately before the dissolution, the relevant percentage for this purpose being that shown in the following Table in relation to—

(a) his age at the dissolution; and

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(3) In calculating for the purposes of paragraph (2) the number of years for which a person has served as a Member of this House before the dissolution, there should be disregarded—

(a) any fraction of a year for which he has so served; and

(b) if a grant was payable to him under this Resolution or any of the former resettlement grant Resolutions on any previous occasion, any period of service which was taken into account or disregarded on that occasion;

and in this paragraph 'the former resettlement grant Resolutions' means the second Resolution of 20th December 1971, the fourth Resolution of 4th March 1980 and the third Resolution of 19th July 1983.

Johnson Freight Services Ltd.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

9.27 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of such an attentive House to the self-evident injustice which has happened to a company in my constituency, and we have it on the authority of Customs and Excise that it has happened to others.

Usually, when something of this kind occurs—no doubt through a mechanical and unintelligent application of the rules—it is rectified when drawn to the attention of a more senior official. If even that fails, a Minister considers the issue with the eyes of someone outside the bureaucracy. If necessary, the rule book itself is amended.

In my experience, virtually the only Government service where a manifest distortion of fairness and common sense is not rectified is in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, which exercises its breathtakingly draconian powers as though it had never heard the word "accountable". I must say at once that I am not making a judgment about every official in the service. Some officials in Customs and Excise are manifestly fair and reasonable, but if one meets an official who is not, the officials will never admit that a fellow official may have been wrong. They even treat their Ministers, if I may say so, as word processors for those who wrote the departmental letters. I do not pretend that on this occasion anyone was crushed, just that people were treated with gross unfairness and insensitivity.

Let me recount the facts so that the House may judge for itself. Johnson Freight Services Ltd. is a company of freight agents in my constituency. In April 1987, it acted as freight forwarders for a cargo of fabrics consigned by a company in Germany to a company in London known as Fashion First Ltd. In order that the goods could be cleared by customs, Johnson Freight Services paid the value added tax of £3,167·19. Before the goods were delivered, it transpired that Fashion First could not pay for them and shortly afterwards it went into liquidation. In order to avoid having to carry the goods back to Germany, the German company sold the goods to a company in Leicester—J and S Garments Ltd.

In the normal course of events, when goods are imported VAT is paid on their value when they are purchased by the importer, who then marks them up and sells them at a profit. VAT is then paid on the retail value and the importer deducts as input the sum that was paid when they were imported. If J and S Garments had been the importer, it would have reimbursed Johnson Freight Services for the VAT paid on importation and it would have deducted that sum as inputs from the VAT which it paid on the sale. So Customs and Excise would have received from Johnson's the VAT due on the import price and would subsequently receive from J and S Garments the VAT due on the retail mark-up. J and S Garments would have paid the precise amount of VAT due and Johnson's would have received the money which it had advanced. That is exactly how the VAT system was always intended to work.

All that was required was that Customs and Excise should have agreed to treat J and S Garments as the importer instead of Fashion First, but that was too simple for the bureaucratic mind. No, it said that J and S Garments was not the importer; the goods had already been imported when it received them. In effect, Customs and Excise was saying that if J and S Garments reimbursed Johnson's it would not allow that company to deduct the sum as input from the money that it sent to Customs and Excise. So Customs and Excise has twice received the money and Johnson's is out of pocket for that amount. Customs and Excise is untroubled by that and, in short, its attitude to Johnson's is "Hard luck, mate. We have your money and we are keeping it."

The first argument of customs was that if agents pay money on behalf of importers it is a matter for Customs and Excise and the importers. That would be an understandable argument if the money had not been paid twice. If there is to be a loss, it should not fall on Customs and Excise—I accept that. The other parties should be left to sort out between themselves who is to bear the loss. However, in this case, there has been no loss—Customs and Excise has received its money. There has been a loss only because Customs and Excise received the money twice and it wants to keep both sums.

Customs and Excise then said that the money would have been returnable if, instead of the goods being sold to J and S Garments, they had been re-exported. They could have been returned to Germany and, presumably, sent back to this country as a fresh importation. Johnson's might then have reclaimed the money, but someone would have had to pay the freight charges both ways.

You and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are perhaps simple about these matters, but would we not have thought it more sensible to sell the goods in this country rather than re-exporting them? In any event, even if Johnson's had known about that provision and re-exported the goods, it would not have availed the company because it would apply only if the transaction took place after 31 June 1988. Do not ask me why. Even if the provision had been introduced in 1988, there could have been no conceivable objection to a retrospective provision if it recognised rather than took away someone's right.

Finally, when the only alternative would have been to change the mind of Customs and Excise, which clearly it was not possible to contemplate, Customs and Excise said that Fashion First Ltd.—the original importer—might reclaim the money which it had never layed out. As that potential liability existed, Customs and Excise could not repay it to anyone else. Johnson's solved that problem by procuring a letter from Fashion First, undertaking that it would not ask for the money. It was all to no avail—Customs and Excise was, and remains, immovable.

It might be said that Customs and Excise was bound by the regulations. Perhaps beneath that bureaucratic jargon there beats something approximating to human hearts, but however unhappy Customs and Excise was at being unable to help, it was ruled by the statute. Alas, that is not the explanation. Customs and Excise has the power to make extra-statutory concessions where fairness requires them. Indeed, the possibility of reclaiming VAT paid on importations after June 1988, if the goods were re-exported, is itself an extra-statutory concession. But Customs and Excise is not prepared to change the wording of its own extra-statutory concessions. It says, "What we have written, we have written."

The problem may be that such a situation has never arisen before, so there has been no time properly to consider it—except since 1987. But that was not the case. On 5 September 1988, a surveyor in customs at Dover wrote to Johnson:

> "Cases identical to this one where goods have been rejected by the importer and re-sold to another trader have been submitted to Headquarters in the past but no amendments have been allowed".

That, it seems, concludes the argument. The Court of Appeal and even the other place in its judicial capacity may reconsider their former decisions, but not headquarters. We wither and perish, but naught changeth headquarters—it has spoken. The Minister will forgive me for saying that, when I wrote to her, she simply repeated the language of the oracle.

Some hon. Members may wonder why this case has taken so long to reach the stage of an Adjournment debate. Johnson's has been trying since 1987 to get someone in Customs and Excise to listen. It wrote to Customs and Excise at Dover on 11 January 1988 enclosing all the required documents. On 27 January, Customs and Excise replied, "Your request is refused". The reasons given were, first, that the entry could not be changed to show a new importer after the goods had been cleared by customs—I follow the logic but not the common sense—and, secondly, that the original importer still retains the right to reclaim the VAT.

After some oral consultations, Johnson's wrote again, saying that the matters were dealt with in the original documents. A letter came back asking Johnson's to resubmit the original documents, together with the letter of refusal from Customs and Excise. I can only assume that Customs and Excise failed to keep copies. Johnson's did that and then received the letter, dated 5 September 1988, to which I referred. It pointed out that, if the agency pays the VAT on behalf of the importer, that is a matter to be resolved between them. It said that headquarters had rejected similar applications in the past. I have already dealt with those two arguments.

Johnson's then tried writing to headquarters—why should the company not go to the authority that had been cited against it? Headquarters answered that the original importer had the right to reclaim the money. So Johnson's obtained from Fashion First the letter renouncing its claim to the money. The reply was that no new information had been provided which altered the decision.

Johnson's then approached me and I wrote to the Minister, who replied that the claim did not meet the

[Mr. Peter Archer]

current criteria, as though Customs and Excise did not have the power to change the current criteria. I knew that, and I am asking that the current criteria should be amended if they give rise to such manifest injustice. I have been given no reason why that cannot be done. This is the kind of crass, uncomprehending bureaucracy that gives, crass uncomprehending bureaucracy a bad name.

I hope that it is still not too late for the Minister to stand back and consider what she is being asked to endorse. If such an incident can occur in respect of a modest sum, and the Department and the Minister cannot see what is unfair about it, perhaps it is time to circumscribe the powers of Customs and Excise before it does something much worse.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) on the lucid and eloquent way in which he presented the Adjournment debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to explain the Government's position on this matter, despite the fact that I am not only a word processor, but an oracle.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has set out the chronological facts of this case, on those there is no dispute. As he said, in April 1987, Johnson Freight Services acted as forwarding agents for a consignment of fabric from Germany being imported by Fashion First Ltd. Johnson's completed the customs entry documents in the name of Fashion First Ltd. and paid to customs £3,167 VAT on its principal's behalf. It is common commercial practice for importers to appoint agents to deal with customs formalities and pay import charges in that way. In this case, however, the importer refused the goods and is believed to have gone into liquidation. The goods were not re-exported because the German suppliers resold the goods to another United Kingdom trader, J and S Garments Ltd.

As the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, Johnson's applied to customs first to change the importer's name on the import documentation, but that was refused because such changes cannot be made after goods have been cleared by customs and released. The reason for that is to avoid, as far as possible, the obvious possibilities that there might be for fraud.

Johnson's subsequently applied to customs for reimbursement of the money which the company had paid on behalf of the original importer, but which it had apparently been unable to obtain from that importer. Customs refused that application, too, because the law did not provide for such repayment. The law is clear and tightly drawn, and only the importer can reclaim VAT as input tax. It is the legal responsibility of customs to collect all charges due—duty and import VAT—on importation. That is achieved by means of an import entry submitted to customs at the time of importation declaring details of the goods being imported.

It is the importer's responsibility to have his goods entered to customs and pay any VAT or other import charges due. Only the importer can reclaim the VAT as input tax, subject to the normal VAT laws. The law on that is tightly drawn to ensure that two or more different entities should not be able to deduct, as input tax, VAT on the same transaction. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will understand that.

For most importations, import agents or freight forwarders are used. They will submit an entry for goods at the place of importation on behalf of the importer, but importers can submit an entry and pay the VAT if they wish. If an agent or freight forwarder takes it on himself to pay the VAT due on behalf of the importer, that is a commercial arrangement between him and his principal —the importer. Customs regard the payment as having been made by the importer, and have made that clear in its publication, "Notice 702: VAT—imports and warehoused goods".

Mr. Archer: Before the Minister passes on to the next stage in her argument, will she take account of the fact that Fashion First has renounced any right to claim, so there will be no question of two people claiming the same amount of money. The company has said, "We are perfectly happy that you should pay the money to the people who originally paid it to you."

Mrs. Shephard: I have taken account of that matter, but the point is that the contract was between Johnson's and Fashion First and that is where the complaint and the problem for Johnson's lies.

What should have happened? Fashion First should have reimbursed Johnson's for the import VAT that the agent had paid to customs. There is no dispute about that.

Fashion First should then have deducted as input tax on its next VAT return the import VAT paid but obviously it went into liquidation.

Fashion First would properly have obtained the imported goods effectively tax free and would have accounted to customs for VAT on any onward supplies that it made. In respect of those goods, Johnson's could not have been entitled to deduct as input tax on its VAT return the import VAT paid on behalf of Fashion First, because Fashion First was the importer.

As regards deduction of input tax, VAT registered traders can, subject to the normal VAT rules, treat as input tax the VAT that they have paid on goods supplied to them, or imported by them, where the goods are used or to be used for the purpose of their business. In the case of imported goods only, the trader who imports the goods for the purpose of his business has the right to treat the import VAT as his input tax. A freight agent who pays import charges on behalf of an importer cannot acquire the importer's right.

What seems to have happened is this. Fashion First went into liquidation and failed to reimburse Johnson's for the import VAT that the agent had paid to customs. That is where the dispute lies—the failure of the contract between Johnson's and Fashion First.

Fashion First may or may not have deducted as input tax on its next VAT return the import VAT paid, although, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman says, a copy letter dated 28 September 1989 from Fashion First to Johnson's states that such a deduction had not and would not be made.

Mr. Archer: At the risk of being tiresome, I understand that in the first instance one would have expected Fashion First to reimburse Johnson's and then to deduct it from its VAT on onward sale. However, in this case that did not happen. J and S Garments simply stands in the same

position as Fashion First for that purpose. Fashion First has renounced any interest in the matter. Customs have had the amount twice. Apart from a rather curious logic, why should one not treat J and S Garments as if it was in the shoes of Fashion First?

Mrs. Shephard: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman could allow me pursue my argument, I shall come to a clear exposition of the commercial arrangements that shippers and forwarders need to take into account when they enter into such contracts with importers. That is set out in VAT public notice 702.

Fashion First refused the goods and the German supplier resold them to another United Kingdom trader, J and S Garments, so they kept on circulating within the United Kingdom and they were not re-exported.

No VAT was charged on that transaction. J and S Garments neither paid import VAT on the goods, nor made a corresponding deduction of that VAT in input tax on its next VAT return. J and S obtained the imported goods as if it had both paid the import VAT and subsequently deducted it. In no circumstances would either Johnson's or J and S have been entitled to deduct as input tax on their respective VAT returns the import VAT paid on behalf of Fashion First.

In law, only the importer who has imported the goods for the purpose of his business can reclaim the import VAT and he does so by means of normal VAT returns. An agent who enters into a commercial arrangement to pay import charges on behalf of an importer does not acquire his principal's right to reclaim the import VAT as input tax. That is stated unequivocally in the June 1986 edition of public notice 702. I shall read that in full, because it will help clarify the argument. The leaflet says:

"If you act as a shipping or forwarding agent for importers and pay or defer VAT on their behalf, you cannot reclaim the VAT as input tax because the goods are not imported for the purpose of your business. Although Customs usually deal with agents in relation to the importation and clearance of goods, it is the importer's responsibility to ensure that the goods are properly entered and to pay VAT and other charges due. Only the importer can, subject to the normal rules, reclaim any VAT paid as input tax.

If for any reason you decide to pay the VAT or defer it to your own account on behalf of the importer, you should remember that this is a commercial arrangement between you and your principal. Payment of VAT in these circumstances does not entitle you to make any reclaim to Customs in the event of difficulty. Customs regard the payment as having been made by the importer. Whether or not the importer has received the goods the importer has a legal right to reclaim the tax subject to normal roles.

If the importer fails to pay you the VAT or goes into liquidation without reimbursing you, you cannot recover the money from Customs and Excise. Your only recourse is to the importer".

I know that that is not the burden of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument. He is saying that that is the law, but we should see common sense and try to change it. My point is that nothing could possibly be clearer than the position laid out in those paragraphs. It is absolutely clear that if a shipper is not paid by an importer with whom he has entered into a contract, he cannot recover the money from Customs and Excise; his only recourse is to the importer. Johnson Freight Services, as an experienced forwarding agent, which undoubtedly provides services for merchants in the import-export business, would be aware of that.

Mr. Archer: The hon. Lady has been extremely courteous and helpful in giving way. Does she accept that that provision is to protect customs against a loss? I accept that if there is a loss, it should not fall on customs. However, in this case there has been no loss; customs has received the money twice.

Mrs. Shephard: I do not accept that. If two parties enter into a commercial arrangement, it is no part of customs to bail out either party in the event of the arrangement's failing. That is the point.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned extra-statutory concessions. Customs staff are not quite the hard-hearted and faceless persons whom he is trying to depict. I feel it incumbent upon me to defend them in their absence. An extra-statutory concession was introduced in 1988.

VAT is a tax on the consumption of goods and services in the United Kingdom. If goods on which tax has been paid to customs at import are re-exported and have not entered the UK economy, it is clearly unfair to the agent who paid the tax on behalf of an importer that he should have to bear the cost should the importer not reimburse him. During 1988, agents and freight forwarders made representations to customs about that problem. In July 1988 the Minister then responsible for customs—my right hon. Friend the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), now Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—announced in the House an extra-statutory trial scheme for repayment to agents where certain conditions were met, and 30 June 1988 was adopted as the start time.

It is deeply irritating to be caught on the wrong side of such a line. However, in this case, because one of the criteria is that the goods should have been re-exported in the same state, the extra-statutory concession would not have helped Johnson. It is specifically to deal with the case where goods have not entered into and are not being circulated in the United Kingdom economy. That is why that concession cannot apply to Johnson Freight Services. Sadly, it entered into a commercial arrangement with Fashion First that went wrong. If Fashion First has gone into liquidation, perhaps Johnson's first recourse should be to the liquidators.

Normally, Adjournment debates offer a window of opportunity, but I have been limited to giving the clearest possible explanation of the Government's policy. VAT public notice 702 is clear. The fact that there might be a commercial risk involving VAT and customs is laid out clearly in the leaflet. It is clear that only importers can reclaim VAT on goods that are imported for the purpose of business and, if a problem occurs, the shipping agent, the freight forwarder, cannot have recourse to customs.

Mr. Archer: I am criticising not the clarity of the notice but the injustice of it. Is the Minister saying that, under no circumstances, would customs or the Treasury consider amending the notice to take account of circumstances where customs has had the money twice?

Mrs. Shephard: One can never say never. In the past, Treasury Ministers have considered aspects of VAT schemes and the way in which VAT works to see what injustices might be righted.

The commercial position of freight forwarders is so clearly laid out in VAT public notice 702 that they are

[Mrs. Shephard]

aware of the risk. Should a company with which they have a contract go into liquidation, they cannot have recourse to customs.

I sympathise with the predicament of Johnson Freight Services and with the arguments that were advanced by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, with all the skill for which he is well known. In drawing up rules and legal arrangements for contingencies, it is important to ensure that the rules and regulations and risks are laid out clearly so that those who are entering into arrangements are aware of the risks that they may be running.

It is important to protect the revenue. We are all rather grateful for the proceeds of VAT as national revenue. A tax-collecting system must be so arranged that the possibilities of fraud and mistake are minimised. I have much sympathy for the right hon. and learned Gentleman and much admiration for the way in which he presented his case. I said that one never says never, but, as things stand, we must stick to the position laid out in VAT public notice 702.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 May 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE AND VALUATION

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Michael Portillo and Mr. Allan Stewart, presented a Bill to abolish restrictions on the power of the Secretary of State to designate authorities under section 100 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988; to amend the grounds upon which the Secretary of State may make a report under Schedule 3 to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987; to make provision for the valuation of domestic properties in England, Scotland and Wales; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 3 June and to be printed. [Bill 163.]

Israel

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

9.35 am

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend and constituency neighbour the Minister of State for replying to this brief debate on Israel-United Kingdom relations. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his most constructive interview on Israel Radio last week, of which I have read the text.

I should like to say a little, first, about why I chose this subject. The United Kingdom has extremely close relations with Israel. The Balfour declaration of November 1917 first gave British support to a Jewish homeland. As the mandatory power between 1920 and 1948, we were directly responsible for the area then called Palestine. The countries that we now call Iraq and Jordan were effectively created by Winston Churchill after the Cairo conference of 1921. The Hashemite dynasties were placed on their respective thrones by him, largely to assuage the anger of the Emirs Feisal and Abdullah because Feisal was turfed off the throne of Syria by the French. The flag of the new nation—or, rather, of the reborn nation of Israel—was raised on 14 May 1948 as the British high commissioner left Palestine for the last time.

There are many people alive today—some of them still in this House—who were physically present in those difficult and dangerous days. Britain and Israel will always be good friends, because our friendship was born out of the sufferings of the Jewish people and nurtured by the political and social institutions that we bequeathed to the state of Israel.

Then there is the Jewish community in Britain. I am not a Jew and I have no Jewish family, constituency or business interests, but because I am closely connected by friendship with our Jewish community, I know the intense loyalty and affection that they feel for the Jewish state of Israel, while of course being among the most distinguished, valued, patriotic and hard-working of all the subjects of Her Majesty the Queen.

I came to this cause as an undergraduate at Cambridge —a Christian by conviction and practice and studying history. As a student, I read about the Inquisition, the Crusades, the pogroms in western Europe and Tsarist Russia and the ultimate abomination of the Nazi beasts. I knew in my heart then, 30 years ago, and I know it to this day, that there had to be an answer to the stake, the rack, the pogrom, the gas chamber and the crematorium. There could be no Christian theology that could ignore or excuse the stench of burning Jewish babies. There had to be a political response which showed that evil did not finally triumph at Auschwitz. There must be one place in the world where a Jew could feel entirely and unhesitatingly at home. That place is the Jewish state of Israel. Its rise, like a phoenix from the ashes of the crematoria, will always be an inspiring cause for me, and I make no apology for it.

I am not blind to Israel's faults, but I am not blind to Britain's either. I love my own country and, although I am a Gentile, I love Israel as well. I count it an honour to receive filthy, anti-Semitic hate mail, as I often do, and as I certainly will after this speech. I know that the mild burden which I carry in receiving such muck is as nothing

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to that placed on the Jewish people by Christians for 2,000 years and carried week after week by Jewish Members of this House in their own postbags.

I make these points because that is the background against which I want to deal with a number of specific issues. I welcome unreservedly the generous tributes paid by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State to the courage of the Israeli people when they were facing ordeal by Scud missiles during the Gulf war. As the allies asked, Israel did not retaliate, but that put great strain on its political and social structure. Hon. Members should ask how we and our constituents would have felt if we had endured missile attacks night after night and made no military response.

It was right that Ministers should show support for the Jewish state, and it was right that sales of British oil, suspended since the oil crisis of 1979, should be resumed. It is now appropriate to go further. United Kingdom trade with Israel has hovered around £1 billion for too long. We need a quantum leap in that important market. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews are pouring into Israel, and many more are likely to come over the next few years, and I want to see British firms being encouraged by the Government to make their contribution to housing those people. A strong trade mission to Israel, headed by a senior Minister, would be appropriate as soon as possible following the worthwhile visits by Ministers to Kuwait and other Gulf states.

The Department of Trade and Industry should take a much more vigorous line over the Arab trade boycott, which is not recognised by Britain and which lacks international sanction. The boycott is wrong in principle and should have no place in a civilised world trading system. European legislataion should be drafted along the lines of United States laws to outlaw the boycott. The Department of Trade and Industry should tell British firms to ignore it rather than just to use their commercial judgment.

I cannot understand why we still retain an arms embargo against Israel. It is nine years since its military operation in Lebanon. Yes, there are still some Israel military personnel in Lebanon and the South Lebanese Army of General Lahad is trained and armed by Israel. However, Lebanon has effectively been annexed by Syria, which has thousands of troops in that sad country. There are foreign troops all over the middle east in other people's countries—some by invitation, some not. Israel has no difficulty in obtaining weapons from the Americans, and it makes many of its own anyway.

In the completely changed circumstances after the Gulf war and with the collapse of the Warsaw pact, I should have thought that our British arms companies would welcome access to the Israeli market. At present, we are leaving the way clear to the Americans to sell weapons to the Israelis and the Arabs. That does not help British business or diplomacy. The embargo policy has lost all meaning and should be changed at once.

I have a few random thoughts on how we should proceed with the peace process, which is crucial to relations between Israel and the United Kingdom. Humility is called for from a Gentile living on the peaceful Rutland-Northamptonshire border. Members of my family are not threatened with stabbing every time they go shopping and I do not live 20 miles from a country that is still theoretically at war with mine. I know that everything that I shall advocate today is hotly disputed by many Jewish people in Israel and virtually all the Arabs. There is no one solution and no single proposal that commands significant majority support in Israel, and we elected western politicians should remember that when we draft our paper scenarios for peace in the middle east. I shall give my beliefs, for what they are worth.

First, no borders between Israel and its neighbours are sacrosanct except those with Egypt which have been settled by a formal peace treaty. The other borders are ceasefire lines and remain open to negotiation. Secondly, no useful or honourable purpose can be achieved by Israel remaining in permanent military occupation of the whole of the west bank and Gaza. The local Arabs do not want Israel there and there cannot be a lasting peace on that basis. Further Jewish settlements in disputed areas are unwise and put unnecessary pressure upon those seeking peace, but such settlements say nothing about the final status of those territories. Nor is it acceptable that such areas should be required to be Judenrein. The dreaded concept of "transfer" is unacceptable and monstrous, as is the concept that all Jews should be prevented from living in an area that has been sacred to them for thousands of years, but they may not always live there under an Israeli flag.

If there are to be real and worthwhile negotiations on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, they will involve land for peace, but not necessarily all land. If both sides approach peace talks on the basis of non-negotiable maximalist demands, they will never get off the ground. The great powers cannot impose a settlement. They cannot resolve the internal political differences in the Israel democracy or among the Palestinians.

In 1921, Churchill could put Arab emirs on the thrones of countries that he had created by the exercise of colonial authority. However, if the United States is not even prepared to depose Saddam Hussein by force after totally defeating his army, it is ludicrous to think that Secretary Baker or Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh can act like the Emperor Napoleon and Tsar Alexander at Tilsit in 1807 or like Sykes and Georges-Picot in 1916 and carve up the middle east between them.

Any settlement must be accepted by all parties to the dispute, and they must be able to sell it to their people. It is pointless to go to a conference table saying that no part of the Golan Heights will ever be handed back to Syria and no new sovereignty will be allowed over the west bank and Gaza.

Equally, it is useless to say that nothing else will do except that the Golan Heights should be returned unconditionally to Syria or that there can only be an independent Palestinian state comprising the whole of the west bank and Gaza, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Those are not negotiations: they are war cries. I have told distinguished Palestinians in the consulate general in Jerusalem—the people met by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister and by Secretary Baker—that if all that they are prepared to demand is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on pre-determined borders, there is no point in having a peace conference, because

they will already have spelt out their non-negotiable demands and the Israelis would not attend such a conference anyway.

Also, I have told Jewish friends that, if all that they envisage is the status quo or an ultimate outcome of limited Arab autonomy, that would not be the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. No Arab leader could possibly accept that except as a temporary and transitional stage, as was proposed in the Camp David agreements over a decade ago.

There must be a peace conference. Both sides need to compromise on the initial arrangements. The Palestinians should be encouraged to hold early internal elections, as proposed by Mr. Shamir in May 1989. The newly elected leaders should be recognised as the Palestinian part of a joint delegation with Jordan. Of course, most of them will be members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and some will be Hamas. They do not need to say that too loudly and, as Shimon Peres has said, it is best not to inquire too closely into their background once they are elected. There is no need to argue about their home address, whether it be Ramallah or Nablus road, Jerusalem, as long as it is not Tunis or Baghdad. Israel will not sit down with people who boast loudly that they take their orders from Yasser Arafat, who sided with Saddam Hussein in the Gulf war. If the elected spokesmen of the Palestinians are prepared to control their public rhetoric, a joint delegation could be created which would be representative and realistic.

There seems to have already been some movement on the conference. Israel would prefer no conference and bilateral negotiations with its Arab neighbours. Syria and the PLO want a United Nations conference with all five permanent members of the Security Council and the Arab states so that they can avoid direct negotiations with Israel. Neither proposal is realistic. The best answer is what Secretary Baker and Foreign Minister David Levy have been inching towards, which is a regional conference under joint American-Soviet auspices with a plenary session, separate working parties and perhaps a report-back session six months later.

The question whether the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the European Community should be represented by observers is a relatively peripheral matter on which concessions could be made by Israel. Of course, Israel is unhappy with the United Nations because of the notorious "Zionism is racism" resolution. That should be scrapped at once. Also, it is doubtful about the European Community, which it regards as pro-Arab since the Venice declaration. Those are not matters of great substance. They are not like Kissinger's "three lousy hills".

The main thing is for discussions to get under way. It is perfectly possible for Israel and Syria to make peace, given proper agreements on security and electronic listening devices on a totally demilitarised and United Nations-supervised Golan. I cannot see that this is a sensible time for new Israeli settlements, called Brukhim and Kanaf, to be established on the Golan by Mr. Ariel Sharon. It is possible for progress to be made in separate discussions about the west bank and Gaza, provided they include a Jordanian-Palestinian deputation and neither side persists with maximalist demands.

I would not pretend to any great optimism, and the behaviour of the PLO in the Gulf war made matters harder. An announced immediate end to the intifada and a release of more detainees could represent joint confidence-building measures on both sides. Public renunciation of all acts of violence by the PLO and a freeze of further settlement activity on the west bank would be other useful steps.

Many people may have been led to believe that peace between Israel and the Arabs was just around the corner once the Gulf war ended, but specialists on the issue know that, like the 400-year-old Irish question, it is one of the most complex and divisive problems in the world. Perhaps it is a problem without a solution—only with an outcome, as happened on the battlefield in 1948, 1967 and 1973—but I hope and pray that that is not so. "Blessed are the peacemakers," and never more than when trying to make peace in the holy land itself.

9.50 am

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on his success in the ballot and on his speech, which, as ever, was balanced. He speaks with much knowledge, sensitivity and sincerity on these issues. When he leaves the House at the next election, his contributions on the middle east will be missed by many of us.

I should like to pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State in improving, on a personal level, relations between Britain and Israel. The Foreign Secretary has developed a warm personal rapport with the Foreign Secretary of Israel, and the visit that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State recently paid to Israel was a great success. When Ministers visit the middle east, it is rather like their having to dance on eggs. My right hon. and learned Friend managed his visit with much skill.

I welcomed the answer that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State gave yesterday that

> "The PLO certainly discredited itself by its conduct during the Gulf war"

and that—this is a slight change in Government thinking —

> "We are not pressurising the Israelis to sit down at the same table with the PLO."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 926.]

That is implicit recognition that attitudes in the middle east were changed by Yasser Arafat's decision last August to embrace Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. In so doing, he knocked the ground from under those who were seeking to get discussions going between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

There is no doubt that there is a great reservoir of good will in Israel for the United Kingdom. I had the privilege to be in Israel in 1986 when the then Prime Minister made the first official visit to Israel by a British Prime Minister. The spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm and welcome that she received showed how warm relations were between the two countries. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will soon visit Israel. I hope also that, at some stage, a member of the royal family will do so, because unfortunately, ever since the creation of the state of Israel, members of the royal family have visited her neighbours but never Israel.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton, I pay tribute to the self-restraint and statesmanship shown by the people of Israel during the Gulf war. I do not believe that any other democracy,

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seeing its people being killed and attacked by missiles from the sky, would have been as willing to show the same self-restraint.

We all welcome the tremendous influx of emigrants from the Soviet Union to Israel. Sometimes we in the west do not understand that many people are emigrating to Israel—200,000 a year, and about 400,000 in 1990-91. That is the equivalent of 5 million people migrating to the United Kingdom. I recall the unholy row about passports being offered to enable 55,000 heads of households in Hong Kong to come to the United Kingdom in four, five or six years' time. In Israel, 400,000 people are being assimilated within a short period.

That is placing tremendous strains on the Israeli economy, which must provide jobs and housing and teach the immigrants new languages. That involves a huge cost. I hope that we in the west, who have fought so hard to secure basic human rights for the people of the Soviet Union, will be willing to help with the cost of resettlement.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that many Soviet Jews are seeking to enter Israel because they were not free to practise their religion and culture? That is a legacy of anti-semitism, which has done so much to destroy relationships.

Mr. Marshall: I agree with my hon. Friend—on this matter we can describe ourselves as hon. Friends, I look forward to the day when, on other issues, the hon. Gentleman will be an hon. Friend.

I visited the Soviet Union three years ago and met several refuseniks. I was appalled by the stories that they told. It was impossible to teach or learn hebrew without running the risk of imprisonment. The intolerance and persecution that they suffered was out of this world. It was an eye-opener for someone who had not seen religious intolerance, except perhaps occasionally in Glasgow, to realise that it was so rife in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Gladstone once said that if he solved the Irish question the Irish would change the question. I hope that that will not be true of the middle east. Peace in the middle east will be achieved by a series of building blocks. The first building block in the 1970s was Camp David. I hope that in the 1990s the next building block will be in Gaza and that we shall eliminate the Arab boycott. I hope that the Euroepan Community, which is based on free, unfettered and non-discriminatory trade, will legislate against the Arab boycott. If we are not to achieve success on a European scale, I hope that the United Kingdom will follow the lead of the five other European Community countries that have legislated against the boycott.

I hope that we shall recognise that peace will be achieved not by a major international conference, with 16 Arab states reading prepared speeches, but, as at Camp David, by a series of bilateral accords. We must recognise that the most likely place for the next building block is Gaza, and that if it is to become an independent state it will need a huge influx of capital. I hope that those who are willing to make speeches and lecture the state of Israel about the need to make concessions will recognise that that capital will have to come from the western and Arab countries, because no other countries can provide hope for the people living in Gaza.

9.59 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on having chosen this subject for debate. I shall go further and say that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton brings to such debates an unusual balance which, I am afraid, is often lacking when we discuss this subject. I agree with the basic proposition that on this issue more than on any other we hear an unbalanced view and an excess of emotion. Therefore, I think that he brings to these debates a very distinguished point of view.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton is to leave this place at the end of this Parliament. As he said in his speech, he is a near parliamentary neighbour of mine. I should like to say that I regret his decision; he will be a loss to his constituency and to the House. He will also be a loss to the state of Israel, because he urges the cause of Israel in a way that the House finds profoundly persuasive.

My hon. Friend began his speech by reminding the House of the very close connection between the United Kingdom and the state of Israel. He was right to do so. That connection is based on history and on common values. We are a friend of the state of Israel. We are also a friend of most of the Arab states and, I should like to think, of all the Arab peoples and—in so far as there is a distinction—of the Palestinian people. One of the characteristics of friendship is the right to speak with candour: if friends cannot make criticisms of friends, who can? It is important that we discuss these issues, and we are entitled to make criticisms of our friends without those criticisms being in any way misunderstood.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton spoke of the close relationship between the two Governments. I am glad to say that that relationship has improved substantially since the latter part of last year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Israel in October last year and has thereafter maintained close contact with Mr. Levy, the Israeli Foreign Secretary. I had the pleasure of visiting Israel about two weeks ago and of receiving in London Mr. Netanyahu, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met Prime Minister Shamir in April of this year. We have a close relationship with Israel as we have with the Arab states and with the Palestinian people.

My hon. Friend said that the state of Israel and the peoples of Israel behaved with great courage and forebearance during the Gulf war. He was right because they did. They were subjected to an unprovoked and brutal attack by a tyrant but did not strike back. Nobody doubted their right to strike back—of course, they would have been entitled to do so; any sovereign state would be entitled to do that—but it was not in their interests or those of the wider world. The wider world is grateful to them for the restraint that they showed.

My hon. Friend referred to the importance of trading relations between our two countries improving still further, and again he was right to do so. Expressed both ways, the trade is about £1 billion and we should like to see that expanded. My hon. Friend knows that there is to be a substantial trade delegation to Israel in June—I think that about 30 business men are planning to go. I very much

hope—I echo a point made by my hon. Friend—that it will be possible for the Minister for Trade to go to Israel this year.

My hon. Friend also spoke about the boycott and the arms embargo. I regard the boycott as a thoroughly undesirable policy. My hon. Friend may know that there was a meeting on 11 May in Luxembourg between the European Community and the countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council. I, in common with other representatives of the European Community countries, impressed on the GCC representatives the great importance of relaxing the boycott. My hon. Friend was wholly right about the desirability of that. The only point on which I do not agree with my hon. Friend is the desirability of legislation on that issue, because I believe that it would be so unenforceable as to make the attempt undesirable.

My hon. Friend referred to the arms embargo, but I am not able to help him on this issue. He will know that the arms embargo was imposed on the state of Israel in 1982 as a consequence of the invasion of the Lebanon. The troops of Israel are still in the Lebanon and we wish to see all foreign troops leave. That means especially the armies of Syria and those of Israel: they must go as soon as possible. While they are still there, it would not be sensible for the arms embargo to be relaxed.

I shall now deal with my hon. Friend's main point about the peace process.

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): My hon. and learned Friend fails to mention one important matter. Does he accept that Israel is the only true democracy in that part of the world?

Mr. Hogg: I certainly accept that within the state of Israel as historically defined Israel is a true and pure democracy.

I shall now deal with the question of the peace process. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton began by saying that one should approach this issue in a state of humility. He was right to say that, not least because, as far as the state of Israel is concerned, it is not a mere dispute; it is about the security and sovereignty of its land. It is idle for us to pretend that there is not, or has not been, a threat to the safety and the security of Israel. We need to remind ourselves constantly that one of the duties of the international community, reflected in resolutions 242 and 338, is to ensure the security of the state of Israel. That is a duty on all of us and is part of the equation. The other part of the equation is the duty, also reflected in resolutions 242 and 338, to ensure that the Palestinian peoples have a right to self-determination and have political rights. That balance must be struck.

I found the concept of building blocks, expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, very persuasive. There is merit in that approach to the problem. Indeed, it is an approach that I see reflected in many of the Baker proposals as I understand them. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton advocated a pragmatic, step-by-step approach which calls for the ultimate settlement to reflect the purposes of resolutions 242 and 338. I find that approach and those principles wholly persuasive.

My hon. Friend was also right to make the important point that a settlement cannot be imposed upon the state of Israel by the great powers because the state of Israel is a democracy as far as its historically defined frontiers are concerned. Israel, as historically defined, is a pure democracy and we cannot impose upon it a solution that the peoples of Israel believe would imperil its very existence. What we can and should do is to try to persuade the peoples of Israel and their Government of the need to make a number of important changes.

My hon. Friend was also right to say that any settlement must involve a recognition of the principle of land for peace. He was also right to say that it would be highly dangerous for the parties to adopt maximalist positions and to refuse to depart from them. A number of steps could be taken by way of confidence-building measures and my hon. Friend mentioned some of them. He suggested, for example, that there should be an end to the intifada and that the detainees held by Israel should be released.

I entirely agree with that approach. We should try to find measures that could be taken which would enhance the confidence of people on both sides. My hon. Friend has given two examples and there are many others. One example is the cessation of the construction of new settlements, which my hon. Friend mentioned. They are not a help to the peace process. Other examples are an end to the boycott and to the state of belligerency, a willingness to ensure that all the higher educational establishments in Israel and in the occupied territories are open, and a recognition that people should not be obstructed when they wish to go to work. All would be worth the doing and would enhance confidence.

My hon. Friend said time and again that we must be careful not to make those things pre-conference conditions. Let us not hedge the process of talks with too many difficulties. It will be difficult enough to get the parties to sit down at the table without creating too many pre-conference conditions.

My hon. Friend mentioned the role of the United Nations and the role of the European Community. In abstract terms, there is every reason why the United Nations should play a prominent part in the discussions that we hope will take place, not least because, if a settlement is ultimately negotiated, one or more of the parties will, I suspect, wish to see that settlement underpinned in some way by the Security Council. However, the question is not whether it is intrinsically justified, but whether it is desirable to make the presence of the United Nations a pre-condition to the negotiations taking place. I have many reservations. It is a good thing for the United Nations to be present, and I hope that the state of Israel will not make the presence of the United Nations in an observer capacity a barrier to the commencement of the regional conference.

The same point applies to the European Community. As my hon. Friend said with such force, the United Kingdom has a long-standing relationship with the middle east, as have many other countries in the European Community, such as France. In years to come, it is certain that we in the European Community will be asked to play a part in the economic revival of the region. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said just that. It would be foolish to make the presence of the European Community, which has an important role to play, a barrier to discussion. I hope that the state of Israel will show flexibility on that point.

My hon. Friend also dealt with the question of the Palestinians, and he approached the matter with real good

[Mr. Hogg]

sense. We are not saying to the state of Israel that it must sit down with the Palestine Liberation Organisation at the conference table. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made that point yesterday, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South drew attention to it this morning. We are saying two things: first, that the PLO is a factor in the area and has a role to play; and, secondly, that those who purport to represent the Palestinians at the conference table must be able to speak with authority and must carry conviction among their own people. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton said. Let us not look too closely at the addresses of anybody.

My hon. Friend ended in a persuasive way when he said that, with his long experience in politics, he thought that the issue was one of the most difficult that any diplomat or politician has had to encounter. He recognises the possibility that there is no solution, only an outcome. However, like him, I hope otherwise. If we do not see peace between the parties there, we face the prospect of war. Peace will require a great effort of will and a willingness by all to compromise. The first step to that process is to get the people to sit down at a table, and that will not happen unless the parties are prepared not to impose too many pre-conference conditions. When the parties sit down at the table, the process of negotiation will open up a variety of questions and opportunities. We need to get the parties there. If there are too many pre-conference conditions, we shall not get them there. My hon. Friend's contribution to the subject was of unusual distinction.

Dangerous Dogs

10.14 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am grateful to have the opportunity for a debate on curbing dangerous dogs and on the control of those animals. Several of my hon. Friends wish to take part in the debate. However, I and, I am sure, my hon. Friends would have been willing to have had a few minutes knocked off this and other Adjournment debates if the Government had made a statement here about Robin Leigh-Pemberton's 17 per cent. pay increase this year which is part of a total increase of £20,000. He is one of the people appointed by the Government who have called on ordinary working people to make sacrifices. I say that by way of comment and it does not, naturally, form part of my main debate. I am just snapping at the Government's heels. It is appalling that people line their pockets in the way in which Robin Leigh-Pemberton has apparently done.

The debate stems basically from pressure generated outside because of a series of attacks by dogs, culminating in the saddest attack of all—that on Rucksana Khan, which has received much publicity. The problem does not solely concern pit bull terriers. I will list some of the recent attacks which were described in a recent edition of the *Daily Express*.

On 16 January, six-year-old Rachel Hetherington was mauled by a friend's pet lurcher near her Birmingham home. She received 26 stitches. On 18 February, William Roach, aged 38, was savaged to death by his alsatian at his home in Rusholme, Manchester, as his wife tried to rescue him. On 22 March, baby Steven Berry was mauled in his pushchair by a bull terrier at a Sheffield bus stop. On 7 May, five-year-old Michael Parkinson was savaged by two rottweilers near his Bradford home. He received 80 stitches. That incident stimulated me and other hon. Members to table an early-day motion calling attention to the need for the control of dangerous dogs.

On 8 May, three-year-old Natasha Thorpe's nose was almost bitten off when she was attacked by a collie at a neighbour's house at Craigmillar in Edinburgh. She received 40 stitches. On 8 May, Frank Tempest, aged 54, had his nose and ear ripped off by two pit bull terriers as he walked home from work in a Lincoln suburb. He needed micro-surgery. On 10 May, Karen Jowett, aged 21, was attacked by a doberman in Westgate in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. She needed more than 100 stitches. On 13 May, two-year-old Paula Holmes was mauled by her grandmother's American pit bull terrier at her Bolton home. She suffered a broken nose and needed stitches for facial injuries. On 15 May, Pat Lord, aged 39, underwent micro-surgery after her right arm was chewed to the bone and broken by her pet rottweiler. Some pet! On 17 May, police constable John Cooper was savaged by a pit bull terrier in Newcastle. He received stitches in a throat wound.

The attack that especially caught the public's concern was that on Rucksana Khan. I quote from the front page of the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* which says:

"Rucksana was tossed about like a rag doll by the ferocious dog for 15 minutes while onlookers struggled to free her from its vice-like grip ... The six-year-old from Springfield Street, Manningham, Bradford, suffered 23 dog bites to her back and three deep bites to the left hand side of her chest where the dog gripped on for dear life. She has five other bites to her chest and lost two teeth in the attack ...

One doctor said today that the injuries were the worst of their kind he had ever seen. Rucksana was a hair's breadth away from losing her life in the attack."

The paper carried a colour picture of little Rucksana resting in her hospital bed, and it was obviously a very bloody picture. I do not generally endorse such exploitation, but the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* was right to use the picture, as the *Yorkshire Post* was right to use a black and white picture. Other papers were also right to use the picture because it has helped to jolt the Government into the awareness that millions have been urging on them for the past three or four years.

The Government have been warned time and time again. A clause was added to the Local Government Act 1988 allowing the Secretary of State to make regulations to enable local authorities—or such organisations as he may, after consultation, designate—to introduce a dog registration scheme. I shall return to that in detail in a moment, but the fact is that those powers have not been exercised, on the ideological ground that their exercise would produce an irrelevant and unwanted layer of bureaucracy. In my view, and in the view of virtually all the animal welfare organisations, that is not the case. I shall refer in a moment to those who support a dog registration scheme and explain how such a scheme could help with the control of dangerous dogs.

During our debate on the Local Government Act 1988, as reported in Vol. 124 of *Hansard* at columns 933-35, I cited the sort of accidents that were taking place then, in 1987. The headmaster of a first school in my constituency took a small boy home because he was feeling ill—a generous and helpful gesture on the part of that headmaster. What was the outcome? When the headmaster got to the house where the little boy lived he found that there were four dogs, one of which, a rottweiler, broke loose and attacked and mauled him, breaking his arm. The headmaster was so badly injured that he was off work for three months. It took two dog wardens, who were hastily called, to keep the dog off him. As is the usual rule, there was no prosecution because the dog was destroyed and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 does not close that loophole. The following day, the irresponsible dog owners, at whose hands the headmaster had suffered grievously, bought a doberman to replace the dog that had been put down. People can only stand by, helpless.

A constituent of mine who lived near the house in question had a baby daughter. The family had rather a nice small back garden, but they could not leave their baby daughter in it in her pram because they were frightened that the doberman or the rottweilers would leap over the fence and savage her. Why should people have such limitations placed on their freedom and enjoyment? Once one's baby daughter has grown up, one cannot go back. During that cherished period, the family were denied many happy moments in their garden because the irresponsibile family living nearby owned four savage dogs. Mercifully, that family has now gone and the problem has disappeared.

Bradford has one of the best dog warden services in the country, but it does not have the money to operate a seven-day service. It would like to, but, like all local authorities, it is short of cash. So what happened at weekends while my constituent was in that predicament and wanted to take her baby daughter out in the pram? Sometimes the doberman and the rottweilers were allowed to roam loose and she did not dare go out. She could not call the dog warden service on Saturdays and Sundays because it does not operate at weekends. That is the sort of encroachment on people's pleasure, freedom and happiness to which irresponsible dog ownership can lead.

On 21 May, I received a letter from a woman, who wrote:

"I have three children aged 3, 6, and 8 years, and there are a lot more young children living and playing on the same street. I really believe it is only a matter of time before these dogs do harm someone."

My correspondent is referring to two pit bull terriers owned by the occupiers of the house next door—a house in Bradford. She continues:

"We have reported the problem to the police but they cannot do anything unless someone is harmed by the dogs. The dog warden seems to have his hands tied also. After so many recent attacks surely it would make sense to make stricter laws as a matter of urgency, before another child or adult is attacked by these dogs, and this time killed.

I happen to be in a position to know that dog bites are a frequent occurrence and sometimes it can be the fault of the victim for teasing the dogs. But these dogs just attack for no reason at all. They wag their tails and look friendly at first but then they just turn fierce . . . even in the garden. I am terrified that these dogs will jump over the fence one day and in so doing end up in our garden. If this did happen and mine or any other children are hurt, I would never ever forgive Mr. Baker. He has done enough damage in his previous role to children without killing them off altogether."

That is a succinct review of the position.

As I said, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 did not alter matters significantly because, although it increased penalties, it did not provide for them to be applied to owners whose dog is killed following an attack. The owner cannot be fined if the dog is dead.

There is a real need to extend protection to include not only pit bull terriers but dobermans, rottweilers and alsatians—the breeds mentioned in the list of attacks that I gave at the beginning of this brief debate. They are all unpredictable and potentially highly dangerous animals. Yesterday, when I suggested to the Home Secretary that we might consider classifying them under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, the right hon. Gentleman responded by suggesting that that Act specifically excluded dogs. On my reading of the Act, stored in the No Lobby, that is not the case, although I suppose that it may have been amended by a subsequent measure which has not been brought to my attention. In any case, a narrow amending Act—I have presented a Bill to Parliament for that very purpose—could lead rapidly to the application of that Act in respect of dogs. My guess is that such a measure would receive overwhelming support in the House.

The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 provides for local authority licensing, for powers to inspect premises to ensure safety, and for the refusal of a licence if there is any danger to the public. Any breach of conditions or failure to obtain a licence is a criminal offence and the provision is self-financing because a charge is made for the licence fee.

Bradford has an excellent dog warden service with six staff. Such local authority services could certainly provide help and guidance for owners. Some owners buy fluffy puppies, which, a few months later, turn into big, savage rottweilers. Some people are simply helpless in the face of such dogs and they need the help and guidance that the dog warden service can provide.

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

Dog wardens could also help to enforce a dog registration scheme. The Government say that irresponsible owners would not register. But what about the decent owners who would welcome registration, who want to look after their dogs and who gain great pleasure from dog ownership? Should they suffer as a result of that attitude of irresponsible dog owners? Saying that we should not have a registration scheme because irresponsible owners would not register is like saying that it is no good having criminal sanctions in respect of burglary because burglars do not like them. That is nonsense. Under a registration scheme, if dogs are a menace, their registration details can be checked and their owners brought to account. Guidance and help can be given where necessary and dogs can be put down if they are out of control.

I shall place on record what a dog registration scheme would do and quote a briefing paper prepared by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for a debate in the Lords in June 1990, of which the RSPCA sent me a copy:

"The knowledge of an owner that a particular dog can be identified back to that particular owner promotes responsible ownership. So, for example, people are less likely to let a dog stray to get injured or create nuisance.

The link between the dog and a named owner is important for effective enforcement: e.g. 95 per cent. of stray dogs caught by Bradford dog wardens are disowned. Both cruelty and attack prosecutions have failed through lack of the proven link. Media attention on the most prominent cases has generally brought a result in terms of finding owners, but a very large, unrecorded number of cases never get to court."

The Minister of State, Home Office has set her face against a dog registration scheme for some reason that is beyond human intelligence. A young woman constituent of mine was attacked in Manningham park by a terrier. She will have scars on her legs for the rest of her life. The owner who encouraged the dog to set upon that young woman was approached by the police. They would have prosecuted under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, which, as the Minister is aware, provides penalties including imprisonment for people who encourage dogs to attack others or fail to have a potentially fierce dog muzzled in a public place. However, the police will prosecute only when they have clear proof of ownership and that is precisely what a dog registration would achieve.

When the police approached the young man who had set the dog on that woman, he said, "It's not my dog. I've given it away to my friend." On the basis of that, the police said that they could not prosecute. Although I pressed them to prosecute, they said that they would have difficulty proving the case in court. That is an important aspect of a dog registration scheme. The young woman who is scarred for life thinks very little of the Government who, after I wrote to them, said that there was nothing that they could do.

The level of the dog registration fee depends on whether it is meant to pay for registration only or for a complete control and welfare package. The Association of District Councils has suggested a £15 to £20 once-only fee and the London School of Economics suggested £10 annually for an entirely self-financing scheme.

Why should all owners have to pay? While other Department of the Environment policies are increasingly based on the "polluter pays" principle, proposed dog control duties for local authorities are to be funded only from the poll tax. The benefits for responsible dog owners include speedy recovery of stray dogs and the perception by non-dog owners that dog owners are paying their way.

Surveys show that dog owners generally do not begrudge helping the less well-off. A fee will also help to deter impulsive acquisition and the giving of dogs without due consultation. There can, of course, be proper exemptions for the blind and disabled. Such a system works successfully in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Farmers Union reports that sheep worrying cases have decreased markedly against the background of a growth in the sheep flock from 1 million to 2·3 million in December 1989 mainly in the lowlands and often near town fringes where the problem of worrying is greatest.

The Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has reported a dramatic reduction in roaming packs of dogs which are of great concern to many people. It has also reported that there are fewer stray dogs on the streets. The director of the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals challenged many points made by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment in the debate in April 1980.

In France, the Netherlands and West Germany, where compulsory dog registration schemes are in force, the stray dog problem is small. The highest percentage of dogs returned to their owners occurs in West Germany, where 66 per cent. are returned. West Germany has a nationwide licensing scheme coupled with compulsory registration and tattooing of pedigree dogs. The greatest stray dog problems are found in Italy, Portugal and Spain where compulsory registration and identification schemes are not in force—and also on the United Kingdom mainland.

In Sweden enforcement of the compulsory registration and licensing laws has resulted in a 90 per cent. reclaim rate with very few strays. London is 10 times the size of Stockholm, but Battersea Dogs Home receives 88 times more strays than the one stray dogs home in Stockholm, which never fills its 50 cages. It is clear that stray dogs always represent a potential danger.

Registration would help to curb dangerous dogs by promoting education and training through its national database targeted at problem areas, by discouraging ill-advised acquisition, by encouraging neutering and by providing a properly resourced and effective dog warden system to enforce banning orders. While a hard core of the most irresponsible owners may fail to register, the threat of penalties is likely to cause them to exercise greater control. Registration enforcement also gives an extra sanction to dog wardens who are often aware of particular problems.

I do not have time to refer to the long list of local authority and welfare organisations, hygiene associations, the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, farming organisations and dog welfare organisations that support a registration scheme. However, that support clearly exists.

Legislation is required to control a wider range of dogs than just pit bull terriers, whether the Government use existing legislation—of which there is a plethora—or whether they introduce new legislation. Action must be taken as a matter of urgency.

The *Yorkshire Post* and the *Telegraph and Argus* have campaigned vigorously over the issue and the *Yorkshire Post* has referred to the Animal Health Act 1981, which gives widespread powers to the Minister to control

dangerous dogs and to ensure that they are muzzled. The Minister should consider that act with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

It is also important to introduce a compulsory insurance scheme against third-party accidents. The dog registration scheme is important. The *Telegraph and Argus* does not always endorse my point of view, but in a useful editorial it stated:

"It should not be forgotten Ministers are responsible for the fact that the law over dog control is in a mess. Nicholas Ridley, when Environment Secretary, abolished the dog licence because the fee had been left unchanged for so long that it was costing more to collect than it brought in for the Government . . . Because of their obsession with cutting official controls"——

the Government—

"opposed the alternative of modernising the dog licence by raising the fee to a sensible level with a national computer register of owners and exemptions for special cases like guide dogs for the blind. The money would have been given to local authorities to employ more dog wardens to deal with the growing menace."

The *Telegraph and Argus* conducted a telephone poll which showed overwhelming support for that point of view. Such a scheme is eminently sensible and I strongly urge the Government to consider all my points and the points that my hon. Friends will make and then introduce legislation as a matter of urgency.

10.37 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on introducing the debate, and as I agree with everything that he said, I will be extremely brief.

My hon. Friend referred to the picture of Rucksana Khan which jolted the Government, after 12 years of inaction, into trying to do something to control dangerous dogs. Many of my constituents have been concerned about dangerous dogs and the control of dogs in general for a very long time. They suspect that Cabinet Ministers are not seized of the urgency of the problem because many of them do not come into daily contact with dogs, certainly not with stray dogs, and most definitely not with dangerous dogs.

My constituents and the constituents of every hon. Member in the Chamber today come into contact with such dogs. Every day they must run the gauntlet of stray and dangerous dogs. They have to live next door to dangerous dogs. Indeed, one of my constituents lives in a block of flats where there are dangerous dogs. A mother rang me recently to tell me that she is too terrified to visit her daughter who lives in a block of flats because the tenant downstairs has three dangerous dogs. Her daughter is too terrified to go out or to allow her child to go out because they must pass the dogs which live below them. In the case of Rucksana Khan's attack, the owner of the dog lived in a one-bedroomed third-floor council flat. I do not think that such a situation can be tolerated any longer.

I warn the Government that, unless they do things that have the popular support not only of the overwhelming majority of the public but of dog owners, their efforts to tackle the problem will fail, and fail sadly and miserably. We saw with the poll tax that, if the Government seek to do things that do not have the popular consent and support of the overwhelming majority of citizens, they are bound to fail. The Government must take action that commands general support, and in particular the general support of dog owners.

There is no doubt that the central issue to success in this matter is the early introduction of an effective dog register. There are 8 million dogs in this country. There are 10,000 American pit bull terriers, it is believed, and 1,000 are thought to be in the city of Bradford. We must know where those dogs are and who owns them. If we are to take effective action, a dog register is vital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South referred to the poll that was conducted by the *Telegraph and Argus*. It is very revealing. When asked whether they supported a dog register, 785 people said yes, and only 47 said no. When asked whether they supported muzzling, 873 people said yes and just 60 said no. When asked whether they supported import bans, 740 people said yes, and just 16 said no. When asked whether they supported the humane destruction of extremely dangerous dogs, 824 people said yes, and 130 said no.

Therefore, I urge the Minister at least to say that the Government are willing urgently to reconsider introducing a dog register. That is the central pillar on which we can build effective and comprehensive legislation to deal with the control of all dogs and tackle the menacing problem of extremely dangerous dogs. If when they present their Bill the Government do not respond to public opinion, I and many other hon. Members will seek to amend it to introduce a dog register. I hope that we can do that on a free vote. I have no doubt that, if that happens, a dog register will be supported and introduced. However, I would much prefer that to be done with Government support and through Government legislation. I hope that the Minister will say that the Government are beginning to change their minds and to come into line with public opinion.

10.42 am

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) for giving us the opportunity to debate this issue. I shall make just a few remarks and will reserve my other comments for the Second Reading debate.

As someone who has worked as a voluntary supporter for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for many years and has owned Staffordshire bull terriers, I endorse the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, South and for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). The debate is not only about fighting dogs. Dangerous dogs are in a number of categories, including those that are specifically bred for fighting either as breeds or as cross breeds.

For 10 years we in the animal welfare movement warned that the Government's inactivity in banning the introduction of American pit bull terriers would lead to a massive overproduction by breeders for the purpose of supplying the dog-fighting market. Breeders cannot tell a bitch to have one or two pups. Each time a breeder breeds dogs for the dog-fighting market, a huge surplus finds its way into the open market for those who want such dogs for a macho image and for those who, unfortunately, believe that such dogs can, with training and control, act as normal family pets, but that has not been and never will be the case.

Straying feral dogs are dangerous. For millions of years, dogs have had instincts of aggression, territorial packs and scavenging. When dogs stray or become feral, those instincts become even more apparent. Because of

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

those instincts, they become dangerous and regularly attack many hundreds of people. Many estates and communities are being terrorised by large packs of stray and feral dogs. There is also the problem of family pets that become dangerous because of a lack of training and control or the social environment of their owners.

It is no solution to isolate American pit bull terriers and fighting dogs in the short term. We cannot deal with the problem of dangerous dogs if we do not introduce a dog registration scheme. How can we tackle the issue of those who breed for dog fighting and those who breed for financial gain if we do not have a registration scheme to identify dog breeders, owners and fighters who are responsible for the problem in the first place? How can we tackle the issue of stray feral dogs if we do not have a dog registration scheme? A dog registration scheme would bring accountability to those who irresponsibly get rid of their animals or who, through lack of training or control, allow their animals to become dangerous to themselves and others in the community.

The isolation of the pit bull terrier and other fighting breeds will not resolve the issue. Hon. Members will have to discuss the matter again in five years. People involved in dog fighting will simply switch to the cross-breeding of English bull terriers and Staffordshire bull terriers. If we are interested in protecting the traditional dog breeds of the United Kingdom, we must introduce a registration scheme. Without such a scheme we shall see a switch to other dogs and aggression being bred into other breeds. Pit bull terriers are already being used for fighting and badger baiting.

The matter is complex. Unless the Government are prepared to take on wider issues than that of registration, hon. Members will debate dangerous dogs again and again. People will be killed, accidents will proliferate and people will be damaged for life. People involved in dog fighting and badger baiting will continue the evil and awful trade that they call a sport. Family pets such as the Staffordshire and English terriers will be exploited for dog fighting and badger baiting.

I plead with the Government to make registration an essential core of the legislation. Without that central core, the issue will not go away and will become worse. In the end, the British public will decide. The public are sick and tired; they have had enough. They often cannot go safely about the streets of London because of the dangerous animals that roam our streets. It is time to take action against such animals.

10.47 am

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I welcome the excellent initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) in promoting this issue. I wish briefly to draw attention to the plight of 130,000 postmen and postwomen throughout Britain. In Wales last year, 600 postmen and postwomen were attacked by dogs. Nationally, the figure is 7,400, causing 5,300 days lost in absence at a cost to the Post Office of £0·5 million; that is an increase in days lost through absence of 12·5 per cent. Those attacks are increasing relentlessly, making Postman Pat's life a misery. Postmen and postwomen are worse off than sheep. At least farmers have rights of redress in respect of dog attacks on sheep. Postmen have absolutely none.

I ask the Minister to respond to two issues. First, the proposals that the Government have introduced are confined to public places. Postmen complete their deliveries on private property. Will the Government protect them?

Secondly, only a handful of attacks on postmen and women in recent years have been committed by pit bull terriers. The overwhelming majority of attacks were by other breeds of dog. The Government's case is unsustainable. We need not their piecemeal proposals, but a comprehensive system to make dog owners accountable, to protect postmen and women and to protect the general public. Until a dog registration scheme is introduced, the Government's proposals will be seen as nothing more than a public relations exercise.

10.49 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and to the hon. Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and for Neath (Mr. Hain) for bringing this matter to the House this morning. I have every respect for the sincerity and depth of feeling of all hon. Members about the matter. The backcloth to the debate has changed markedly over the past day or two. In the first case, as the House will know, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced yesterday several measures aimed specifically at dangerous dogs. The principal and most important measure was a total ban on pit bull terriers and other fighting dogs. As the House knows, we propose to ban ownership of the American pit bull terrier, the Japanese tosa dog and any other dog of a type commonly bred for fighting. The ban on the import of such dogs is already in place.

The hon. Member for Makerfield warned us that the ban might not be sufficient in the future because other dogs may be bred for fighting. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already said that there will be a facility in his Bill to add to the schedule other dogs that are known to be bred for fighting.

The ban is aimed specifically at fighting dogs. These are dogs which have been bred to be aggressive, to care little about the pain that they suffer, to fight without regard for the injuries that they receive and to be entirely fearless. Once such dogs start to fight, they cannot be stopped and they are quite unpredictable. Many people in papers and discussions have likened the dogs to loaded guns. We are all agreed that there is no place for such dogs in our society. We must take urgent steps to rid ourselves and our society of the dogs once and for all. It would be irresponsible to equivocate because measures are needed urgently. I am grateful to Opposition Members and all hon. Members for being willing to see urgent measures brought before the House and action taken immediately.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Minister mentioned urgency. It will still take some time for a considered piece of legislation to be introduced in the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said, it could have been introduced earlier. In the meantime, could not emergency legislation have been introduced yesterday or today to require the muzzling and keeping on a lead of dangerous dogs? If such

a measure became inappropriate or was included in later legislation, it could be amended in the later legislation. But something could have been done. Nothing will change until the legislation is introduced.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is right that we have not been able to introduce legislation in the past 24 hours. However, we shall introduce the measure within a week or so. We are preparing the legislation as urgently as possible. It is important that the measures are as comprehensive as possible and that they achieve the support of as many people as possible.

Alongside the measures that we intend to introduce, the Government have decided to create a new criminal offence which will be along the lines of, and a development of, the offence outlined in the consultation paper. The Town Police Clauses Act 1847 does not apply to back gardens, as the hon. Member for Bradford, South rightly said. The Act applies only to public places. The hon. Member for Neath may be interested to know that, during consultation on the existing legislation, considerable support was expressed for making the offence under that Act apply to private property. I hope that we shall introduce such a measure. I hope that that will go some way to meeting the anxieties of the hon. Member for Neath about attacks on postmen and women.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South raised several points on the existing law as it relates to the types of dogs that we have discussed during the past few days. There is some misunderstanding about the criminal law as it stands. It seems that people do not appreciate that it is already an offence to allow unmuzzled ferocious dogs to be at large. It is with that offence, under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, that many people are charged when their dog has caused injury to others.

The new offence will apply more widely and I hope that it will be easier to enforce. It will attract higher penalties than the current offence. Those who allow their dogs to cause injury to others must know that they will be liable to the criminal law. It is essential that that is clearly understood.

However, there will be other cases where the law does not have the flexibility that perhaps it should have. There may be cases where it seems right to a court to order, not the destruction of the dog, but muzzling or some method of control suitable to the circumstances. We feel that it is right that the courts should have such additional powers and the Bill will provide them. I hope that that will meet the anxieties of the hon. Member for Bradford, West about dogs on housing estates. In my constituency, too, there are several housing estates where tenants own dogs that can cause anxiety to others.

Alongside those measures, the existing powers of the court, now reinforced by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989, guarantee the destruction of any dog that is dangerous, regardless of whether a criminal offence was committed or can be established. These powers will remain in place. It is very important to be able to ensure that any dog that is dangerous, of any type or breed, can be put down certainly and without delay. Failure to bring in a dog for destruction renders the keeper of the dog liable for disqualification, as well as fines up to level 5, depending on the circumstances. In such cases it is not necessarily the owners who are at fault. If a dog becomes dangerous and is perceived to be so, that dog is a danger to other people and to human life. That dog is the weapon which must be destroyed. It is absolutely essential that all hon. Members and the public understand that.

As the House will know, last summer the Government issued their consultation paper, "The Control of Dogs". The responses were many and various. However, on two points the general public were unanimous. The first was the widespread desire for the new general criminal offence which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced yesterday, together with increased powers for the courts to muzzle dangerous dogs. The second was the universal public dislike of dogs such as the pit bull terrier which represent such a danger to small children such as Rucksana Khan. We have taken up both points in our recent proposals and I hope that the House will welcome them with the same enthusiasm as the public expressed during the consultation process.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South had a particular interest in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. This is Department of the Environment legislation and I understand that there are the usual technical difficulties in adapting it to the purpose of keeping dangerous dogs. But I do not wish to dwell on technicalities. The purpose of this legislation is to control wild animals, wild in the sense that they live in the wild rather than that they are particularly aggressive. It provides for, in effect, private zoos in which animals can be kept for their own safety and the safety of the public.

Dogs such as the pit bull terrier are not wild animals in that sense. They are domesticated animals which have become fierce through breeding.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall give way in a moment.

I agree that the Dangerous Wild Animals Act sets down requirements which could be used to keep pit bull terriers in conditions of high security, but, I have to ask the House, why do people want to keep dogs like this?

Mr. Madden: Before the Minister completes her speech, will she make it clear to the House and the country that she is willing to test, in the House, support for and opposition to a dog register, which has been the central theme of every contribution to the debate?

Mrs. Rumbold: I cannot think what a dog registration scheme would have done to prevent Rucksana Khan from being savaged. I cannot think what such a scheme would have done to help those who have been seriously hurt, wounded or damaged as a result of violent acts committed by dogs that were out of control. The people who own the dogs to which we have been referring will never come forward to become the registered owners of dogs.

When our backs are turned, those who keep dogs such as pit bull terriers will take them to the pit or train them with heavy weights. They will use live cats as bait. They can use a zoo, as it were, to breed an even more dangerous dog. To put such people alongside those who would be responsible about animals is not to be realistic.

We should have no part in the breeding of dangerous dogs. The dog is a companion animal. It has been bred for hundreds of years to be responsive to humans, gentle and kind. We must give no succour to those who wish to change this breeding to make dogs fierce. As dogs are all of one species, fierce animals can be used to cross-breed with breeds of good temperament to produce fierce

[Mrs. Rumbold]

versions of dogs. We must do everything that we can to avoid that. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduces legislation, that is what we shall endeavour to do.

I hope that it is common ground that we all want dogs of any sort to be of good and reliable temperament. There is no place for dogs which have to be kept in what I would term, to refer to another part of my responsibilities, category A conditions. It makes no sense to have dogs kept in wire cages outside. I hope that there will be universal support for the measures that my right hon. Friend will introduce shortly.

11 am

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that in the past two days there has been a series of points of order, raised especially by the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), about tabling questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on national health service trusts. It was suggested by those two hon. Members that the Clerks in the Table Office were not allowing such questions to be tabled.

Mr. Speaker rightly told me yesterday that no hon. Member wantonly misleads the House. I am sure that you will have noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in column 784 of Tuesday's *Hansard* Mr. Speaker made it clear that he would investigate with the Table Office whether the Clerks had given the indication to which the hon. Members for Huddersfield and for Copeland referred. As some of my hon. Friends, including the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), have learnt most clearly that the Clerks did not give such an indication, and as inadvertently two hon. Members have misled the House, it would be immensely helpful to the House and to clear the good name of the Clerks, who are always completely neutral, independent and above party politics, if Mr. Speaker were to make it clear—not through you now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but before the House rises—that the allegations made by the two hon. Members to whom I referred were entirely false.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am grateful to the hon. Member for what he has said and especially for his reference to the Clerks. My recollection is that Mr. Speaker made the position clear in his statement yesterday. I shall, of course, cause investigations to be made in view of what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's point of order, but the House is cutting into the time of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Mr. Cryer: It is a convention of the House—I am sure that the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) knows this—that when we name other hon. Members during points of order, or when raising issues in other ways, we give them notice so that they have the opportunity to appear in the Chamber to respond to whatever is said about them. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman troubled to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is customary to do so.

Active Citizenship

11.3 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): The concept of active citizenship means different things to different people. It is all-embracing. I believe that active citizenship, when it is healthy, makes for a stable and well-ordered society. As I said, it means different things to different people, and as a Conservative I suspect that I place an emphasis on it different from the emphasis that it is given by socialists.

I am proud to say that active citizenship in Basildon is thriving. Indeed, it is leading the way. I intend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission, to indulge in an unashamed roll of honour to salute all the active citizens in my constituency.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who has given his name to an excellent document entitled "Releasing the Community Spirit". Many excellent ideas are set out in that document, which provides a framework for the active citizen. It is well worth reading.

I am aware that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, is a modest person. He would be the last to entice anyone to praise his efforts. However, I intend to give him praise, for his name is engraved upon the hearts of my constituents. I think that he has visited my constituency no fewer than four times. On each visit he has been responsible for making fundamental improvements to the lives of all my constituents. First, in 1986-87, he was the Minister with responsibility for new towns. He made sure that those who lived in what were termed concrete camps of properties in Vange, who bought them with the best of intentions, were enabled to purchase them back. I cannot over-emphasise how much that has meant to my constituents.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State visited the police station in Basildon and saw at first hand where it was intended to build the new court house. There was an argument about linking the police station with the new court house via an underground tunnel. My right hon. Friend returned to the Home Office and made sure that there would be a tunnel linking the two buildings.

Some years ago, my right hon. Friend replied to an Adjournment debate on St. Luke's hospice. It was while he was a Minister at the Department of Health and Social Security that privately, behind the scenes, he encouraged local residents to pursue the project.

I congratulate the Government on their many initiatives to encourage active citizenship, perhaps the most recent of which was the pledge that £4·5 million of taxpayers' money would be used to support Crime Prevention Week. Sadly, the socialists in Basildon tried to take full credit for the scheme. In fact, it was a Home Office initiative. I am delighted to tell the House that Crime Prevention Week proved to be an enormous success in Basildon. It was successful during the week in question and the many continuing projects will bring enormous benefit for the residents of Basildon in the years ahead.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about our attempts to help Basildon in the past. Is he aware that the attitude of the Labour party in Basildon towards Crime Prevention Week—it claimed responsibility for that excellent and successful concept—ran full in the face of

national Labour party policy? The Labour party chose to condemn national Crime Prevention Week and to condemn the actions of all citizens who voluntarily played a full part in making the scheme a success. Perhaps those at Walworth road should talk to the representatives of the Labour party in Basildon.

Mr. Amess: How right my right hon. Friend is. Basildon socialists are frequently out of step with socialists nationally. That is why two Thursdays ago there was a 9 per cent. swing to Conservative party candidates in my constituency. The leader of the Labour group is a treasurer at Walworth road. It must be an increasing worry to those concerned that his advice is being taken by the Labour party.

I hope that when my right hon. Friend replies to the debate he will give details of what local businesses are doing to assist in all the Government initiatives, because I am fed up with people knocking local business. As my hon. Friend the Member for Esher wrote in the excellent document to which I referred, local businesses have been magnificent in their support of active citizenship.

I am not ashamed to say that I am proud to be British. This is the finest country in the world and I am fed up with the British disease of continually knocking ourselves. If we are not moaning about the weather, we are always saying that the grass is greener on the other side. It is not and it is time that we followed the example of others and beat the drum for Britain.

I am proud to live in Basildon, which is the finest new town in Britain and is the beacon of the south. Because some unkind articles have been written over the years about my constituency—we did not necessarily take offence at the article on Essex man and Essex woman—I initiated the "I love Basildon" campaign, which enabled people to wear attractive badges and display bumper stickers on their cars and in shops. It was an extremely effective campaign which said, in effect, "We live in Basildon and we are proud of our town."

The campaign was specifically aimed at the national problems of litter, graffiti and vandalism. Conservative Members believe in leading by example and that is why I undertook, late at night, to go on what I called anti-vandal patrols. I approached groups of youngsters on street corners and asked why they were there and not attending our local youth clubs and other activities provided in the town. Their main complaint was that, as they were under age and could not drink alcohol, commercial enterprises in the town were not prepared to run discos providing non-alcoholic drinks. Local businesses rallied round magnificently and I am delighted to report that in Basildon we are providing discos at which youngsters can enjoy non-alcoholic drinks.

We also worked with such enterprising people as the Guardian Angels, not in an unorthodox fashion but to demonstrate that we were concerned with individual responsibility. There is no earthly reason why people should drop sweet papers on the floor, throw cigarette ends out of car windows and so on. Throwing litter and rubbish on to the floor costs the nation money and at this time, when we are concerned for the well-being of the economy, we must make sure that every penny is well spent. There is no reason why huge sums of money should be wasted because we have a litter problem.

Local people have set up working parties on the Westminster model and, on a voluntary basis, are clearing up some of our estates and more unsightly roads. I am delighted to report that local schools responded magnificently to national spring-clean week, which proved extremely effective.

Why, when somebody changes the lettering on a street sign so that the name of the road becomes a dirty or swear word, is there never anybody present to see the graffiti happen? I assume that not adults but children are responsible for such graffiti. The parents of those children should accept responsibility for the unsocial behaviour of their offspring. Nobody who indulges in graffiti can be considered an active citizen, in Basildon or elsewhere.

I pay tribute to the police in Basildon. When I became a Member of Parliament, we had one local police station. We now have three, thanks to the support of the Home Office. We have a police station at Pitsea, a new one being built at Laindon and our central police station in Basildon.

We have a magnificent new court house, where people gather in a civilised fashion. Gone is the overcrowding that used to take place in Billericay magistrates courts. In those days there was enormous pressure on the counselling given by social workers and the new court house has raised morale among the members of the probation service and among chief officers. I am delighted with the support that the Government gave to our new court house.

Like the police throughout the country, the police in Basildon are absolutely magificent. I would not wish to be a policeman. It is an extremely difficult job and the men and women in our police force, under increasingly difficult circumstances, because of the change in behaviour of the population generally, face great difficulties. We should congratulate and encourage the police in all their endeavours.

Mr. John Patten: If the police are doing such an excellent job in Basildon and nationally, which the Government and people generally recognise to be the case, and if they are doing an extremely fine job in crime prevention, why does my hon. Friend think that it is now Labour party official policy to take responsibility for crime prevention from the police and give it to local councils? Does he think that the Labour party does not really trust the police?

Mr. Amess: Certainly. I cannot think of a worse scenario than local socialists in Basildon having control of the police force. That would be outrageous and my right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the point.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments on my pamphlet. He does a remarkable job for the people of Basildon and we are hearing much of his own activities behind the praise that he is giving to others. Is not it interesting to note that where there is a good police force, the people respond to it, with citizens wanting to assist and taking a more active part in neighbourhood watch and similar schemes? Has he noted the increasing awareness among younger people of what they can do for youth crime assistance with the police, rather than being on the wrong side of the law? All such matters are part of the community working properly and my hon. Friend's efforts are helping to make sure that that happens in Basildon.

Mr. Amess: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and he is right. I was about to deal with the question of neighbourhood watch schemes and the other

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initiatives to which he referred. Yesterday I had the pleasure to attend the 10th anniversary of the victim support scheme in Basildon. It is a magnificent initiative, again supported by the Government, and the chairman said in his annual report:

"Until recently victims of crime had long been neglected by the community."

My hon. Friends and I feel passionately that the real victims of crime are not given enough attention. The initiative in Basildon has addressed that problem. He went on:

"The Police, the Probation Service and the Judiciary were primarily concerned with the offender. The victim might be asked to give evidence but there was no organisation to help victims of crime".

Does the House understand the role of the active citizen in victim support, which is dependent on untrained volunteers—ordinary men and women who, after selection and training, have time to visit victims? A leaflet on the group says of the volunteers, who are not paid for their sacrifices:

"Volunteers are caring people who are able to listen and respond to the victim's needs. Information on these and on the agencies and services available to them is given to volunteers during training, enabling them to offer victims a confidential service on behalf of the community. Each volunteer carries an identity card issued by the Police."

The victim support group is so dedicated that, when the new court house opened, it initiated a fund-raising team to serve tea and coffee there. It has enjoyed tremendous success with the continuity of its co-ordinators. Although this is a sad and serious project, they have embarked on a scheme to study the causes of murder and manslaughter.

The group has asked me to raise with my right hon. Friend the Minister one point concerning the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. A person in receipt of state benefits can be penalised if he receives a lump sum because state benefits are taken into consideration. I hope that my right hon. Friend can comment on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Esher mentioned the neighbourhood watch scheme. A retired gentleman called Ken Coulter is what is called the divisional controller in Basildon. Every day of the week, he is in Basildon police station working on the scheme on behalf of the community. It is thanks to his efforts and those of his team of volunteers that there are now 600 of these groups in Basildon representing 171,000 residents and guarding 62,000 properties. There are 186 liaison officers and 8,962 people in the youth section. It is a magnificent effort. Our local neighbourhood scheme has piloted a pet watch scheme, which co-ordinates the activities of residents who are naturally upset when they lose their pets. Their contribution to our local society is profound.

Underpinning all this has to be education. I am delighted to say that our schools are doing a magnificent job, in partnership with the police, in educating our young people. Sadly, we lost our way in the 1960s, when we set young people a bad example and in the past decade we have been paying the dividend. Our schools are now in a healthy state. Local police come in regularly to show young people how they can help in developing the concept of active citizenship. I salute the efforts of the police.

Frequently, young people come to my surgery with suggestions for new projects. Only on Saturday, six young people, six or seven-year-olds, asked for my support for an environmental project in Langdon Hills and brought me beautiful coloured drawings. They were going to work with the local community in clearing up their estates.

How sad it is to hear of a minority of parents who expect teachers to do it all for them. Education is a partnership. Schools are responsible for children between 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock, but parents must take full responsibility for their children outside those hours and at the weekend.

Basildon has many voluntary organisations for the handicapped. Sports for the disabled are run by two groups. There is nothing so moving as to go along to these annual sports days and see disabled men and women participating in sporting activities in a way that able-bodied people would find impossible. They never allow disability to hold them back. A wonderful woman, Mrs. Childers, is chairman of PHAB—the physically handicapped and able bodied organisation—which does a wonderful job. I am sad that the socialist council is threatening to take away its transport facilities and those of other similar organisations and is trying to blame such measures on the Government, who are not to blame.

A great deal of magnificent work goes on at Valery lodge, which was inspired by a woman who, sadly, has since died of cancer and her husband, who is blind. Basildon also has a town crier organisation—talking books for the blind. Volunteers meet to produce these tapes, which blind people enjoy. We have the friends of Elmbrook school, which is attended by severely disabled people who have actually climbed to the top of Big Ben.

I have already mentioned St. Luke's hospice. It took a German woman, Trudy Cox, her husband Les and their family to show British people that if one is determined, anything is achievable. We do not have any millionaires living in Basildon, or if we do, they are keeping a low profile. If I knew about them, I would immediately try to sign them up as members of the Conservative party. Despite that, in six years, through tombolas and raffles, the hospice has raised over £1 million.

Mr. John Patten: That is extraordinary.

Mr. Amess: It is quite extraordinary. Last year, the Duchess of Norfolk opened the hospice. Knowing that we have a number of social problems in Basildon, with many people on low incomes, she was able to see at first hand what a magnificent job people had done. Five weeks ago, we were privileged to have a visit from the Princess of Wales. She was deeply moved by the wonderful achievements of Trudy Cox and others in building the hospice.

I congratulate the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, which has 500 members and supplies meals on wheels and book services. The Basildon hospital league of friends has been going for over 25 years and has raised, by the efforts of its 300 members, £25,000. I am the unpaid, voluntary spokesman for the National Association of Hospital Broadcasting Organisations, the largest unpaid voluntary organisation. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Minister would tell the Treasury that the association would be delighted if VAT on hospital radio broadcasting equipment were zero-rated and if the Broadcasting Authority would give the association its own frequency.

The marriage guidance council, RELATE, of which I have the privilege to be president, also does a magnificent job, as do the team of volunteer Samaritans at Little

Lullaway and the citizens advice bureaux. We take for granted the work of the Rotarians, the Round Table, the Inner Wheel and the carnival charities, which each year raise money for local people. I have the privilege of being the president of the local scouting organisation, which will be here soon to enjoy the privilege of having tea with Mr. Speaker. Both the scouts and the girl guides do a wonderful job.

I have the privilege also to be president of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. It, too, does a magnificent job. Basildon boys club and the Unge boys club, of which I am also privileged to be president, do a magnificent job in helping local boys to join in sporting activities. I am delighted that the Minister for Sport is here. I know that he will pay tribute to the work done by the National Association of Boys' Clubs.

The private car hire and taxi charity organisation, which organises an annual run each year, should be congratulated. I introduced a ten-minute Bill, now an Act of Parliament—the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988—that was inspired by the Essex Horse and Pony Protection Society. I congratulate it. Recently we have launched Pets as Therapy. It was inspired by Leslie Scott-Ordish and is based in Maidstone. A team of volunteers offer their friendly dogs to be taken along to old people to be patted. It cheers up the old people.

The Royal British Legion does a magnificent job. I very much regret that the socialists in Basildon seem to be preventing us from having a permanent war memorial. How magnificent the poppy collectors are. The arthritis and stroke clubs also do a magnificent job. Crossroads, of which I have the privilege to be president, provides a care attendance scheme that is responsible on a voluntary basis for providing care to people who have disabled children. It provides counselling advice and looks after disabled people while the carers have a holiday.

Finally, I must certainly not forget the Church. We have 28 local churches which do a magnificent job. I very much regret that only 2 per cent. of the population worship regularly. The Minister and I happen to be Catholics, but to me all the local churches in Basildon do a magnificent job. In particular, I pay tribute to Paul Smith, who leads the Living Word Community church. He goes along privately—I do not have the time to do so—to speak to people who have severe emotional problems. He counsels them on an individual basis.

I hope that in the short time that I have been given for this debate I have demonstrated that we do not need the socialists in Basildon to lecture us on a caring community. It is through active citizenship, through the many voluntary organisations in Basildon, that we demonstrate every day, week and month that we are a truly caring society. We lead the way in the country. I hope that this morning the whole House will join me in paying a very warm tribute to all the active citizens in Basildon.

11.32 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I should like to be the first to join in those words of praise for the active citizens of Basildon. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has given us an extraordinary list—a litany, if one likes—of all the organisations, with many of which he is notably involved, that contribute so much to the life of that town. It is active citizenship, which is the subject of this debate.

At the beginning of his remarks my hon. Friend paid some kind tributes to me. I do not know whether I shall ever be opened up after my death for a post-mortem to be carried out, but if I am I suspect that they will find the word "Basildon", together with a few other words, engraved on my heart. I congratulate my hon. Friend, and, through him, those who help him, on the magnificent 9 per cent. swing to the Conservative party that they achieved at the recent local elections.

It fills me with horror to learn that obstacles may well be placed in the way of a proper war memorial to the deceased active citizens of Basildon by the socialist council in Basildon. I hope that common sense will break out and that that Labour council will be persuaded to think again about what strikes me as the most disgraceful obstacle being placed in the way of the erection of a proper memorial to the dead of Basildon.

I am growing very worried—and I became more and more worried as I listened to my hon. Friend—about other obstacles that the Labour council in Basildon is putting in the way of active citizens. I understand that the excellent organisation PHAB, to which my hon. Friend referred, is likely to have some of its transport that is provided locally withdrawn by the council. That is disgraceful. Disabled people deserve better, even from Labour councils.

I cannot, unfortunately, give an instant response to my hon. Friend's point about value added tax on hospital radios. However, I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am sure that either he or one of his colleagues will get in touch directly with my hon. Friend. He has promoted a most notable debate. It gives me the opportunity to pay tribute not only to him and to the active citizens of Basildon but to the tens and scores of thousands of people of all ages and from all sections of our community who work in or support voluntary organisations and charities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is now well understood and accepted by the majority of people in this country that there is a clear role for these organisations alongside statutory provision by national or local government.

It is a deeply outdated argument, redolent of the late 1970s, that there is no role at all for voluntary organisations in working closely with both national and local government and also in working closely with business in what may turn out to be a fruitful tripartite alliance in the 1990s. From small things larger things grow. Thirty or 40 years ago, housing associations—small voluntary organisations—were not thought highly of by many people in this country, yet now they are a major provider of housing, bringing together national and local government, voluntary organisations and business.

It is only a distant blip on the radar screen, but perhaps in the next 10 or 20 years we shall see bodies called care associations springing up to provide care in the community and bringing together statutory, local and voluntary provision and business help of various sorts. That is why this debate is so valuable. The outdated arguments of the 1970s and early 1980s about each area having its territory and there being a frontier beyond which the statutory service must not advance, or over which the voluntary sector must not travel, is deeply outdated and should be consigned to the dustbin of tiresome debate.

Voluntary organisations also provide people with the opportunity to pick up a theme that has been consistent in

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Conservative thought for the past 200 years. Disraeli is, perhaps, too often quoted in this place, but I quote him again on the need to help the little battalions. If we look across the Atlantic, we see a similar theme, with what President Bush said about the need to look for the thousand points of light in the American community and the work done by the voluntary organisations there. That is something that we wish to promote, not to hold back. That is why we do what we can in the Home Office, and in all Government Departments, particularly through the excellent work of the voluntary services unit, to promote the work that volunteers do.

The House may be interested to know that, starting on 3 June, there will be a major volunteers week during which local and national events are to be arranged to publicise and celebrate the contribution made by volunteers. That will be going on in Basildon, as elsewhere. We take every opportunity to encourage responsible and active citizens to give not just of money but of their time, too. One of the most encouraging trends that we have seen during the 1980s has been the willingness of the business and voluntary sectors to join in partnership with Government to tackle the problems that concern us all. The breaking down of barriers and the willingness to work together is very welcome.

These are not just fine words. I can announce today —I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested to hear it—that we shall be making a grant towards the start up of a scheme jointly proposed by the Home Office, business in the community and the action resource centre to attempt to stimulate more volunteering by employees—a theme and a trend, I think, of the 1990s. This grant—£51,000, or £51,500 for those who are precisely minded in this place —will cover half the cost for the next three years of two pilot projects in Leeds and Leicester. Unfortunately, we did not have a bid from Basildon. If we had, I dare say that one of the two pilot projects would have been in Basildon. The pilot projects have been designed to show how closer links between local, voluntary and business sectors can be established and to develop practical models for employee volunteering which can be replicated throughout the United Kingdom. That will help to promote active citizenship by employees, sometimes during employers' time. Many businesses, large and small, are recognising that if employees are allowed to volunteer for activities, it can help to enrich and enhance the experience of those employees.

There have been many definitions of active citizenship. For me it can be defined as someone making more than a solely economic contribution to their community; someone who not only cares but acts on their caring instincts. In his extraordinary list of caring people in Basildon, my hon. Friend put his finger not on the definition of active citizenship but on the practical outcome of it.

Many people have identified with the theme of active citizenship and it has captured a great deal of imagination and public debate. It has been useful in persuading people to think about the contribution that they might make and in developing recognition of the contribution that many already make to their neighbourhood.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon listed a range of things taking place in Basildon as examples of what can be done. He mentioned crime prevention and gave the name of one active citizen who visits the police station daily and is co-ordinating neighbourhood watch schemes. I am afraid that I cannot remember his name.

Mr. Amess: Mr. Coulter.

Mr. Patten: I pay tribute to him and to the neighbourhood watch movement in Basildon. Crime prevention is very important. It caught the national imagination in April during the first ever British national crime prevention week. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon for what he said about Home Office efforts. Crime prevention week was built on the hard work of the police and other statutory agencies and the hordes of volunteers up and down the country.

I have been amazed at the outright attacks and condemnation of crime prevention week from the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen. Their comments are a slap in the face for the tens of thousands of volunteers and active citizens of all political parties and no political party who took part in 6,000 separate schemes during that week and attracted many millions of pounds worth of private sector sponsorship and advertising which was freely given to promote crime prevention week.

It is clear that the Labour party does not approve of voluntary action in crime prevention. What the Labour party has said—I deplore it—is entirely consistent with the two extremely dangerous themes that are now emerging from printed and published Labour party policy documents. It represents a direct attack on the partnership between active citizens concerned with crime prevention and the police. One of the first things that the Labour party has pledged to do is to take away from the police responsibility for crime prevention—the first phrase of any police constable's oath—and transfer it to local authorities. Tell that to the people of Basildon, Lambeth, Haringey, Southwark and Liverpool and other areas with Labour councils.

Even more sinister is the Labour party's pledge in its printed policy documents—the documents are there for us all to see—to extend the political control of the police by having elected police authorities, starting in London. One can imagine what policing would be like in Basildon if the local authority was responsible for crime prevention and the police in that part of Essex. It would break down the fruitful link between voluntary citizens and the police. I applaud the practical work being done by the Essex constabulary and the neighbourhood watch movement in Basildon. For example, they have introduced the innovative pet watch scheme to which my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon referred.

Characteristically, my hon. Friend has picked on a theme that is catching the imagination of people nationally. The Government will do all that they can, financially and in other ways, to promote that in the coming decade. I predict that the coming decade will see a great increase in national volunteering and the rapid coming together of Government, business and the voluntary sectors so that their endeavours may be put on a sound footing to bring into the foreground of public life the little battalions who can really answer local needs in Basildon and elsewhere.

Sport and Recreation

11.45 am

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): It is a pleasure once more to bring to the Dispatch Box the Minister for Sport so that he may have yet another opportunity to shine. He is looking particularly fresh this morning after a strenuous evening yesterday when he was responsible for spinning the tombola wheel at the sports hall. Thanks to him, I won a prize—a pair of football shin pads. I wondered whether it was an omen for today's debate, but I hope that it will not be that rough. It is a pity that I am taking the Minister away from his beloved cricket. I understand that he was invited to the international game at Edgbaston today. I hope that after the debate he will be able to hurry along the M1 and M6 to see the best of that game.

I should like to apologise for the absence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), who is attending a memorial service to the late Ron Pickering. I am sure that the House will know that Ron Pickering was a great ambassador for sport. He was a great sports commentator, and his passing has meant the loss of a great advocate for British sport. I know that the Minister agrees with that.

This debate gives the Minister an opportunity to tackle several problems. I have had two other debates with him in the recent past. In December we debated the problems facing football, and in February we debated the problems of sport in schools. Also, we had our little clash on Tuesday. It is a pity that we do not have a regular slot for sports questions. I know that the Minister agrees with that as he said so recently on television. The House would like to have an opportunity to question the Minister from time to time, and I know that he would like to be able to answer those questions. I know that he is aware that his hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) and I have been pressing for that facility for many years. Unfortunately, the Leader of the House informed us only 13 days ago that the Government do not intend to provide it. I see that the Minister is surprised. Once more he has been sidelined and I am sure that he wants to get to grips with it because the Leader of the House has written to the hon. Member for Luton, North, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and myself to say that it is not timely to provide a slot. I hope that the Minister will join us in keeping that matter on the boil because such a facility is long overdue. I know that we can rely on his support.

I hope that the Minister did not think that I was churlish on Tuesday for not congratulating him on his Question Time debut. I should like to take this opportunity of doing so. I could not do so on Tuesday because of the content of his answer. I believe passionately in sport, which has suffered greatly in the past from a lack of funding and investment. Therefore, I could not congratulate the Minister on an answer that appeared to contain a boast on his part when there has been a declining level of financial provision for sport under this Government. In reply to my supplementary question the Minister said that, uncharacteristically, I was talking nonsense.

I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that, characteristically, I will not let that remark pass without challenge. Far from talking nonsense on Tuesday, I reminded the Government of their record, according to information from the Department of Education and Science. Figures supplied in written answers show that, compared with five years ago, funding for sport, through grant in aid to the Sports Council and the urban programme, has fallen in real terms by £3·8 million and £11·9 million respectively. That makes a total cut in direct funding, compared with the 1986-87 figure, of £15·7 million.

The Minister may suggest, however, that I should consider the cumulative cut in direct funding for sport in that five-year period. I am only too happy to do so, but I suspect that he will not be too happy to hear what I have to say. The total cut in grant in aid to the Sports Council since 1986-87 is £12·5 million, and in funding for the urban programme £25·5 million, making a total cumulative cut of a staggering £38 million. That is indefensible.

The Minister must explain the reason for this catastrophic state of affairs. Furthermore, he must explain why cuts will continue to rise in the coming year. In 1991-92, direct Government funding of sport will fall, to keep pace with inflation, by a further £5·3 million. *Hansard* got it wrong and corrected it, but that is what I said on Tuesday.

The Minister attempted to obscure those figures in a written answer by observing that over the same period the amount of money generated by the Sports Council without Government help increased from £5·46 million pounds to £10·95 million. If that is the method by which he is attempting to hide the fact that the Government have consistently and drastically cut the Sports Council's budget, it is little short of disgraceful. Effectively, he is saying that, although the Sports Council has made great efforts to increase its income from its own activities, the Government have scuppered its efforts, pocketed the proceeds and left it no better off than it was five years ago. Which of the two is it? He is trying either to expose the Government's pathetic record or to hide it.

I look forward to the Minister's reply and challenge him to dispute the figures that I have announced, which were supplied by his Department and confirmed by the Sports Council and by the Library.

The Minister will also wish to tell the House of his recently announced £1 million scheme for coaching schoolchildren through the National Coaching Foundation. I congratulate him on securing that money, which will be paid for five times over by the reduction in next year's grant to the Sports Council.

I hope that the Minister will tell the House the whole truth about the scheme and will confirm the figure that he supplied to me in a parliamentary written answer on 21 May, which shows that the scheme will last for only eight to 10 weeks, will involve only 0·2 per cent. of children under the age of 11 to 14 in maintained schools, and will cover less than one fifth of local education authorities.

I am aware that the scheme is meant to be a pilot scheme to establish examples of good practice for use in other areas, but the Minister must confirm that funding will be made available to support further projects that might arise from the pilot scheme. If he cannot give that assurance, many will question whether the scheme is the start of something worthwhile or merely a short-term public relations exercise. I am sure that he will wish to allay our fears on that.

Funding for sport is one of a range of issues that the Minister will be considering in the formulation of the

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Government's sports policy. I know that he has consulted a wide range of bodies as part of the review. In a parliamentary written answer on 30 November, he listed more than 50 of them. Curiously, he has failed to consult one body that has consistently and effectively supported sport at every opportunity—the Labour party.

Lest the Minister doubts that claim, I ask him to reflect on the following facts. A Labour Government created the Sports Council and gave Britain its first and, as is universally recognised, finest Minister for Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath. I trust that the Minister will not take too much exception to that claim. A Labour Government published Britain's first, and to date only, White Paper on sport, and introduced the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, which established the system of licensing sports stadiums that is still in use today. A Labour Government fulfilled their duties to European and international sport not only by negotiating and signing on behalf of Britain the European sports-for-all charter but the Gleneagles agreement, which facilitated the application of probably the most comprehensive and solid pressure against the evil of the apartheid regime, the sports boycott, which has been instrumental in bringing about the welcome changes in South Africa.

On a personal note, I am proud to have been the Minister who, in a Labour Government, introduced mandatory rate relief to the level of 65 per cent. for sports clubs in Northern Ireland, which has done much to benefit and promote grass-roots sport in the Province. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath pointed out to the Minister on Tuesday, a Labour Government put their money where their mouth was and provided financial assistance to both the World cup and the Commonwealth games in Britain.

That stands in stark contrast with the Pontius Pilate hand washing that has characterised the Government's deplorable treatment of the world student games in Sheffield and the Manchester-led British Olympic bid, about which I shall say something in a moment.

Over the years, Labour councils and, to their credit, a few Conservative councils have fought, against all the odds, to maintain and develop the highest sporting facilities to implement policies encouraging equal opportunities of access and participation in sport and recreation. No wonder, then, that when my party produced its 21-point manifesto for sport at the last election, compared to the non-existent policy of the Tory party, one Sunday newspaper observed,

"When it comes to sport, there's only one Party in it."

That is still true, but the Government would have us believe otherwise. They say that much has changed, but the record of the Minister and his colleagues, whom I have heard described in the sports world as Johnny-come-latelies, proves that they still do not recognise that sport plays an important part in the lives of people in this country. The Sports Council suggests that some 21 million adults and 7 million children take part in sport or active recreation in Britain each year. I hope that the Minister will at least be gracious enough to acknowledge the debt that Britain's sports men and women owe Labour Governments and councils, who were addressing sports needs long before the Government took office.

Unfortunately, however, the Minister is in a difficult position. I am sure that he—and I mean this—honestly endeavours to do his best for sport. But he is a member of a Government who neither fully understand nor accept the full economic and social case for sport. They see sport as a ready source of income rather than as an aspect of society that deserves financial support. Each year they extract from sport £3 billion in betting duty and taxes, but put back only approximately one fifth.

The Government fail to see that, in reality, funding for sport represents an investment in the health and well-being of this country. For example, sport pays a fundamental role in promoting good health and physical fitness, thus reducing the burden on the national health service. Furthermore, the provision of sporting and recreation opportunities has been recognised by social workers, the police and probation officers as being particularly beneficial in reducing inner-city crime. Given their record, I hope that the Government will take particular note of that point. Should the Minister care to consider the treatment meted out by his colleagues to the report of the working party—Sport and Active Recreation Provision in the Inner Cities—of his predecessor the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), I am sure that he will acknowledge that the Government have missed no fewer than six explicit deadlines for action.

They include the production of a publicly available progress report on the implementation of the report's recommendations by the end of 1990—that is the report I referred to. They also include the production of a practical guidance booklet on dual use, together with the collection and publication of responses by the end of 1990. That has been missed as well. There is also the production of a clear and comprehensive statement of the Government's overall objectives for sport and recreation provision in the inner cities by August 1990. That has been missed. Finally, there was the establishment by 1989 of an inter departmental group to identify, encourage and develop joint initiatives for sport.

"That is a shoddy state of affairs. Many people in the sporting world are saying, in respect of the former Minister for Sport, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), "Come back, you were not so bad after all." The Minister is new in his job and he has yet to make his mark, but it would be well for him to take note of some of the recommendations of his predecessor, for which he received little recognition.

The Minister should stop trying to tell the hon. Member for Luton, North what he has missed—he is desperately trying to find out what happened at the beginning of the debate and I know of his interest in it, but he will have to catch up later because I want the Minister's ear.

It is ironic that, even on simple financial grounds, investment in sport makes economic good sense. Far from being a financial drain on the Chancellor, sport represents a significant factor in the national economy. It is estimated that sport generates about £6 billion of consumer expenditure each year and the sports industry employs more people than the motor manufacturing industry and its ancillary industries—and that is even before the way that the industry has been treated as a result of the Budget. However, if the Chancellor wishes to locate an aspect of the economy—and perhaps the Minister can help in this matter—that has undergone significant and spectacular growth in recent years in spite of his policies rather than as a result of them, he need look no further than the sports and leisure industry. Unfortunately, the Government have failed to grasp the fact—or if they have grasped it they

have not acted on it—that the economic success is only a small proportion of what could be created if fuller backing were given to sport and recreation.

In its 1990 report on local authority support for sport, the Audit Commission acknowledged that participation in sports is supply led and that it depends on the availability of facilities. Given the cuts in funding for sport which, as I outlined, have been the hallmark of this Government, we have missed a golden opportunity for economic investment in that area. That has to stop, and the Minister must come behind us to see that it does stop.

Unfortunately, far from investing in sport, the measures announced by the Chancellor in his Budget will bleed the sports industry further dry. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), in a question to the Minister two days ago, asked him to study the implications of the value added tax increase on sports and sports clubs. In case he has not had time since then to do so or had time to read my speech of 20 March on the Budget, in which I outlined precisely what the effects would be, I shall save him the job and tell him the implications.

The effect of a 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT means that our sports men and women will have to give the Government an extra £105 million in increased tax and duties on items such as equipment and on admission fees. Lest the Minister feels tempted to dispute those figures, I can tell him that they have been checked and verified by the Sports Council, but, more important from his point of view, in a letter dated 17 April from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I know that the Minister will not accuse his colleagues of talking nonsense. I am sure that he will accept, as a result, that the Budget has been a disaster.

Of course the Minister will wish to counter that argument. I have heard him say before that the Budget provided for a foundation for sport and the arts, but even he must realise that he is on shaky ground there. For a start, that much-trailed organisation is still nowhere near coming into being. The Minister is shaking his head, so perhaps he will give us some welcome news today. The Government have provided firm evidence of that by failing to table a new clause to the Finance Bill, which was promised to me by the Financial Secretary recently. That new clause was to effect a cut in the football pool duty to facilitate a foundation. I suggest that that is because there is, to date, still no agreement between the proposed funders of the foundation and the pools companies which are to set up the foundation. If he does nothing else, the Minister must confirm or deny that fact when he replies, because the football, sports and arts lobbies want to know where they stand.

The Government are offering precious little help in this matter. The Minister will know that the Chief Secretary was forced to admit to me in a parliamentary written answer on 28 March that the Government did not have the most basic plans for this foundation, including who would be on it, what would be the ratio of funding between sports and the arts provided in it, how many staff it would need and what measures will be in place to ensure monitoring, audit or accountability of its work. What light can the Minister shed on that?

If the Minister's performance to date is anything to go by, the answer must be none. When he did have a stab at it, he got his sums terribly wrong. I am sure that he will recall his claim on 23 April that the foundation would provide funds of £75 million.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Robert Atkins) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pendry: I am glad that he recognises that he said that. I should have thought that his colleagues in the Treasury were astounded by his claim, because they have been saying that it would provide £60 million. Again, they do not know what they are talking about—or one does and one does not because they cannot both be right. They were talking about £60 million, so where does the magical £75 million come from?

In answer to a written question on 29 April the Minister told me that it would come from increased betting turnover. However, I challenged the Financial Secretary in my speech only 23 days ago to confirm that that would require pools companies' turnover to be increased by 25 per cent. to £1 billion for the current 12 months, but he was unable to do so. Perhaps the Minister can do it—his sums may be better than those of the Treasury. Perhaps he should not be in his current post, but should be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I shall put a word in for him if he can get this right. Instead, the Financial Secretary dodged the question and said that the Minister for Sport would be surprised by my comments. I see that the Minister is surprised. Having had the chance to get over his surprise, the Minister must now tell the House plainly and simply: is he prepared to repeat his claim and suggest that betting turnover will increase by 25 per cent. to provide an extra £15 million for the foundation? The House has heard the question; we shall await the Minister's definitive reply.

To be fair to the Minister, I admit that he has had to suffer at the hands of this Government a pretty raw deal that has afflicted not only him but his predecessors. The Government do not value or respect their Ministers for Sport. Rather, they use sport for convenient public relations exercises and ignore and snub the Ministers involved. The Minister will know that in only too painful detail. For example, he was humiliated by being excluded from any ministerial discussions surrounding the sport and arts foundation until well into the event. I shall give him another chance to come clean. I challenge him to deny that his first official, on-the-record meeting with Treasury officials to discuss the foundation took place on 24 April, more than five weeks after the Budget announcement. I have sympathy with the Minister and I am very much on his side because that is a disgrace. He has also had to suffer the embarrassment of spending months hinting in the national press that he would convince the Treasury to abolish corporation tax for the national governing bodies of sport, only to be wholly rebuffed by the Chancellor. It is no wonder that he was not included in the talks 11 days before the Budget.

I ask the Minister to recall his words to *The Mail on Sunday* on 20 January. He said:

> "I'm looking very hard at the financial structure of sports so they can be released from having to pay corporation tax. I feel very strongly about the tax that sport has to pay and I believe that we can change this and get more money into the grass roots of sport. I'm not going to make any promises"

—to be fair—

> "but there are many sports followers in the Cabinet."

I ask him to explain what went wrong.

Having looked at the financial structure, did the Minister realise that he could not get the Treasury to agree with it, despite his own admission that it would provide a much-needed boost for grass-roots sport? What happened

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to all the supposed sports lovers and sports followers in the Cabinet when he needed them? Chief of those is the Prime Minister himself. Would a sports-loving Prime Minister allow his Minister for Sport to go out on a limb and then humiliate him? I realise that the Minister may choose not to reply to that point and I understand that it may be difficult for him. I assure him that some of us can see the reality behind the Government's hype and we sympathise with him.

Nevertheless, there can be no excuse for inaction by the Government. The Minister must at the very least persuade his colleagues to take action to help the British Olympic bid with financial support and not just with words. The Minister promised 150 per cent. support—perhaps he does not get his figures right after all. To date, there has been not a single penny for the bid or for the wider Olympic movement. As a result, the British Olympic Association remains the only national committee to receive neither direct Government grant nor tax relief.

That is the reality behind the myth of the sports-loving Prime Minister. There is no difference between his policies and those of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). That is not good enough. The Minister must give the House his unequivocal commitment that he will stick to his guns, honour his words of last January and argue the case for the British Olympic Association to be released from corporation tax. Unless he does that, the British Olympic Association will be hampered to the extent of £1·5 million.

The Minister must tell the House that he will vigorously pursue the Secretary of State for the Environment and persuade him to provide urgently needed direct Government money to boost the Manchester-led bid. *[Interruption.]* The Minister has the opportunity now to listen to sport and to respond instead of talking to colleagues to whom he can talk at any time. He must answer the points, otherwise we cannot back him in his sports slot. I hope that the Minister will say something positive about the Manchester Olympic bid. He knows the importance of delivering the goods on this occasion. If he does not, he will be in severe danger of becoming a Minister who is responsible for broken promises. I realise that that may not be his direct responsibility.

It is good to see the hon. Member for Luton, North in his place. He shares many of my views—if hon. Members can believe that—on the sporting world. I will touch on football, and I know that he is passionate about our national game.

Mr. Atkins: What about cricket?

Mr. Pendry: Perhaps I should have said "our national winter game". That would please the Minister.

Unfortunately for the Minister, this debate has come two days late. Until last Tuesday, I would have given some qualified support to the Government for their having changed their attitude towards football. Having had their fingers burnt on the identity card scheme, one would have expected them to make an about-turn. The Government have taken a helpful attitude through the Football (Offences) Bill, and that must be placed on record because it deserves recognition. I hope that the Bill will make our football grounds far more attractive places.

On Tuesday, the Government published their response to the very fine report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs entitled "Policing Football Hooliganism". It seems that the Government have reverted to type. They rejected the Committee's considered and well-argued recommendations for reconsidering the requirement for small clubs to have all-seater grounds and sought to impose full economic charging for policing at football matches. In doing so, the Government are, once again, threatening clubs with a policy that will put many of them in danger of bankruptcy.

The Minister will be aware of the crippling effect that escalating police charges have had on clubs, especially given the additional financial worries of having to meet the Taylor deadlines. How can the Minister defend a policy that will close clubs and undermine moves towards ground safety?

I hope that the Minister will not merely repeat the line, which is always used on these occasions, that the Government have reduced pool betting levy to release £100 million over five years to football. Although that cash is welcome, as the Minister and everyone else know, even discounting the possible rocketing of police charges as a result of Government policy, the money will fall far short of the resources needed by football to meet the Taylor requirements. The £100 million represents a tiny proportion of the £2·4 billion that the Government have taken out of football since 1979 in pool betting duty. The Minister must either promise to argue the case for greater financial help for football or he must give a commitment to press the Home Secretary for a change in the currently disastrous direction. The Minister will not be forgiven for anything less by those who love the game of football.

The Minister will recall that in our debate on sport in schools I asked him to give his backing to the teaching of swimming in schools. I note that, at a conference organised by the Swim For Life campaign on 15 April, the Minister said that there was no doubt that the ability to swim saved lives and that the provision of swimming tuition at school could be justified on that ground alone. At the same conference Hamilton Bland, a faculties consultant to the Amateur Swimming Association, argued that the revenue needed to teach every 10-year-old to swim would be roughly £4·8 million. That is a lot of money and I accept that the Minister may not wish to commit the Government to such resources. He will recognise that I did not ask him to do so when I spoke in that debate. I asked him whether he would give his backing to a survey to find out what the available resources were for teaching children to swim. He chose not to reply to that request, so I repeat it now. Will he conduct a survey and give his pledge to ensuring that all available resources are used to the full?

My final request to the Minister is that he should recognise the importance of the international dimension of sport, especially the potential for using sport as an integral component in aid packages. He will be aware that the Minister for Overseas Development told me in a recent answer that a high priority is not given by host countries to that area of aid. I find that hard to accept, and I am sure the Minister does as well. I hope that he agrees that even a cursory glance at the development and aid programmes of the other European states will reveal many sporting projects. Is it not the Minister's duty to ensure that sport is given a high priority in that area by the Government and that British sport plays its part in the international aid package?

I should very much like the Minister to make a meaningful contribution to the debate. I will, therefore, conclude by saying that many hon. Members of all parties genuinely wish the Minister well. They know that he has a difficult role, and they wish that his position in Government was elevated so that he would have more clout in arguing his case. However, those of us who love sport also recognise that we are not getting a fair deal in the House, especially from the Government. We feel that many things are necessary, and we look to the Minister to play his part and to fight his corner to ensure that we have a better deal. I hope that we shall have more debates in the House on sport and recreation because they affect many people whom we represent.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am willing to call the hon. Gentleman, but I must point out that the Minister has little time. The hon. Gentleman would need to seek leave to intervene because he has a later debate. There is a slight risk that he might not be granted that leave.

12.17 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Robert Atkins): I must say to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) that I tried to give him an opportunity to speak.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on having recovered from last night, as I have. I also congratulate him on having the opportunity to raise this subject today. He is right to say that I would otherwise have been at Edgbaston. He may be interested to know that the most recent score that I have heard is that the West Indies were 44 for two, which is extremely good news.

It would be remiss of me, especially today, not to draw the attention of the House to the sad death last night of one of the greatest of English footballers, Stan Mortensen. He played close to my neck of the woods. He was a great footballer whose passing will be regretted, not least because of the famous cup final that was always described as Matthews's cup final, but which some might argue was actually Mortensen's cup final because he scored such a fine hat-trick.

Those of my hon. Friends who have been kind enough to join me in listening to the debate live in a different world from that of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde. I have made a point—perhaps wrongly, although I hope not—of not talking too much in the early stage of my tenure but of listening to people instead. I have gone round a number of organisations and heard what they have had to say. Broadly speaking, the comments that I have heard and the responses that I have had from those in sport differ widely from the views of the hon. Gentleman.

People always want more money and no one in sport is any different from anyone in any other walk of life. The hon. Gentleman listed so many commitments to increased spending that I did not have time to add them up. I should be interested to know whether his views represent official Labour party policy or whether those commitments were his idea alone.

Mr. John Carlisle: They do.

Mr. Atkins: If that is so, it is more than a little worrying. No doubt the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the shadow Chancellor would have views about the amount of expenditure to which the hon. Gentleman wishes to commit his party.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about parliamentary questions. On Tuesday, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and I had a little banter about maiden questions and debuts. I realise that the situation is governed largely by the ballot but the fact remains that, although I have been in office since last July, the hon. Lady's question is the only one that I have answered orally during that time. Much as I would love to—and much as it is suggested that questions are planted, which, as hon. Members know, is never the case—I cannot answer questions unless hon Members table them. In a notable early-day motion, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North drew attention to the fact that those who were criticising were those who had not tabled questions.

Mr. Pendry: If I recall the early-day motion correctly, the hon. Member for Luton, North excluded me from the charge.

Mr. Atkins: I am sure that he did that as a matter of course. I know that the hon. Gentleman is committed to these matters.

The hon. Gentleman asked a series of questions about figures. I could deal with them in detail, but there is perhaps not enough time, as we have other matters to cope with. I would say, however, that since 1979, we have increased the Sports Council's grant by about 30 per cent. in real terms. As the hon. Gentleman would expect, I am in constant contact with the chairman and members of the Sports Council and we do what is necessary to ensure that the figure keeps pace with inflation.

I find the hon. Gentleman's somewhat dismissive remarks about what the Government have done for sport frankly unhelpful, which, as he is in opposition, I suppose he wants them to be. His views are also largely out of line with those of the sporting fraternity. For example, the hon. Gentleman dismissed fairly lightly the £1 million extra that I was able to find, in relation to the pilot scheme for coaching, on my move from the Department of the Environment to the Department of Education and Science. The National Coaching Foundation, through its estimable director, Sue Campbell, has done remarkable work in encouraging people to recognise the importance of coaching.

It was because of the case that Sue Campbell and others put to me that I was able to find an extra £1 million for a pilot scheme based largely on the achievements of Nottinghamshire county council and on its all-party initiative to encourage coaching out of school hours on an extracurricular basis as well as on highlighting some of the improvements that are needed in physical education in schools. The pilot scheme was divided roughly three quarters to one quarter between able-bodied children and the disabled. It goes without saying—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not disagree—that we need to concentrate on those with disabilities, who can gain so much confidence and achieve so much, sometimes in integrated sporting efforts with able-bodied people as well as in the sporting activities in which they alone participate.

The pilot scheme was intended to establish whether some of the ideas tried locally in Nottinghamshire could work in a national context and it has been well received. It will be extended round the 10 regions of England. The

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hon. Gentleman may dismiss it as involving only 2 per cent. of the young population, but, none the less, I am sure that it will achieve a great deal and that we shall learn some lessons from it.

I cannot give the hon. Gentleman assurances about further funding because the essence of a pilot scheme is that local communities should be encouraged to recognise the importance of the activities involved and then fund them for themselves. The Government strongly believe that we should encourage the private sector to continue to be involved and to increase its commitment to sport, whether through sponsorship or in other ways. All the evidence points to the fact that the private sector is keen to do that—indeed, that it is already doing it. We want to encourage the mixed funding of sport, whether through the dual use of community facilities or by the support and sponsorship by companies of schools and clubs.

The hon. Gentleman referred to football, which is pertinent at the moment, and to police charges. I have told the Home Office—and it has received it well—that the clubs and I believe that it would be most helpful if there were more concentration on the professional and proper stewarding of football matches in addition to the police presence. The stewards involved would, of course have to be properly trained to a standard acceptable to the local police authority, which is required to ensure that the policing is properly done.

Football is unusual in not having contributed to the cost of policing over the years. I am sure that rugby pays its own costs, and cricket certainly does. I do not see why football necessarily should be any different, although I recognise that the introduction of police charges would immediately have a detrimental effect on the lower clubs. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a strong supporter of football and he and I share the hon. Gentleman's concern, which is why we have persuaded the Home Office to phase in the charges over five years and, at the same time, to encourage the use of properly trained expert stewards so that the police requirement is reduced. Both measures should assist somewhat.

There is no difference between the hon. Gentleman and me on the importance that we place on swimming—not least because it is a life-saving activity as well as a recreation and competitive sport. It is argued that, from the age of 11, every youngster should be able to swim. There is no difference between us on that objective. None the less, to do that immediately would require a substantial increase in funding and resources. We are arguing not about the objective but about the timing. As I said, I suspect that if the hon. Gentleman made a commitment to ensure that everyone had those facilities, which would involve a great deal of money being spent on swimming pools and so on, the Opposition spokesmen on Treasury matters might take a slightly different view.

Mr. Pendry: I am sure that the Minister heard me correctly. I am not saying that the Government should commit themselves to the figure given by the Amateur Swimming Association. I am merely asking him to commit himself to look at the available resources before deciding what funds the Government can commit.

Mr. Atkins: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not accusing me of having a closed mind. At the swimming conference that I attended, I undertook to consider all sorts of matters relating to funding.

Before I conclude my remarks, I wish to mention the Manchester Olympics. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde and I share a commitment to the north-west as we both represent north-western constituencies. I am sure that he is as delighted as I am that Manchester's bid is now the United Kingdom's Olympic bid. I have already had conversations with the British Olympic Association and the Manchester bid committee and I reinforce my commitment that I will do everything I can to promote that bid. However, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde will be aware that more than just one Minister is involved in respect of the costs and other matters connected with the bid.

When pleas are made for extra money for the bid, it should not be forgotten that by the year 2000 we will have spent about £3 billion of Government money on infrastructure in the north-west. In Manchester that expenditure will include the second terminal at Manchester airport, the supertram and the new road structure for which, in my former incarnation, I was partly responsible. A lot of money is being spent in Manchester, and deservedly so because it is the best region in the country.

I had a conversation with Bob Scott yesterday and the Manchester bid committee restated that it expects the bid to be privately financed. The committee expects to meet that requirement. In that respect, the bid committee seems to disagree with the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde. Incidentally, such privately financed bids proved successful in Atlanta in the United States.

From the Prime Minister downwards, the Government are committed to sport. We will continue to give evidence of that commitment through the foundation, which I have not been able to refer to in detail today because of the time available to me. However, that foundation more than doubles the commitment of funds to sport by the Government. That gives the lie to the Opposition's suggestion that the Government do not appreciate, are not committed to and are not interested in sport. We are and we remain so and, while I do this job, that commitment will be reinforced on every possible occasion, supported by my colleagues who take a continuing and deep interest in sport on a regular basis.

Franco-British Relations

12.30 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I must declare an interest as I am the chairman of the Franco-British parliamentary relations committee and deputy chairman of the British section of the Franco-British Council. I have never made and am unlikely to make a penny in profit out of those activities.

It is difficult to speak of Anglo-French relations without lapsing into well-meaning platitudes. I am pleased that so many people in Britain derive an agreeable impression of France from programmes like "'Allo, 'Allo" and from the elegant jottings of Mr. Peter Mayall and the accounts of his life in Provence. I share his passion for that delectable region.

However, there is another France which is more a matter for our discourse. It is a France that has long since outstripped our living standards. It is the France of Peugeot Talbot, of the Compagnie Generale des Eaux, the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, and the great public works which ensure that all regions of France will have swift access by road and rail to the Channel tunnel without necessarily having to pass through Paris from the day that the tunnel is opened.

That other France is the country which has made up for its lack of natural energy resources by the most ambitious and successful nuclear energy programme in the world. It is a country which now has for the first time a woman as its head of Government, the formidable Madam Edith Cresson, who was well known in her previous ministerial capacity to several present and former Cabinet Ministers. She was well liked, but also somewhat awesomely respected.

It is that vibrant and sometimes over-thrustful France which is now one of our main partners in the European Community. The 600 years of enmity to the beginning of this century and the close alliance in two wars during the century are no longer what concern us now. We are now concerned with the future. Nor should we concern ourselves too much with purely bilateral Anglo-French relations as such.

I served for five years in the British embassy in Paris in the 1950s. I was lucky enough to serve under two great ambassadors. Oliver Harvey taught me to distinguish between the pays-légale and the pays-réel and Gladwyn Jebb taught me to recognise and to urge the opportunities for Britain to get alongside France in the building of a united Europe. However, three of my five years had elapsed before I discovered that there was an official sitting somewhere in the depths of the Quay d'Orsay who dealt with Great Britain. He subsequently turned out to be the French Foreign Minister and then ambassador to the United Kingdom.

What really matters now is how our two countries work together or fail to do so in the European Community in the maintenance of world security and in promoting the development of poorer countries in the third world.

There are certain things which I and those who care about good relations between our two countries would like to see done to improve those relations further. The Franco-British Council, the body set up by the late President Pompidou and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), set out to promote closer co-operation in matters outside the direct competence of Government. It is duly grateful to the Government for their generous moral support and the only slightly less generous financial support for the council's work. However, the fact remains that the support given by both the French and the British Governments for those activities pales into near invisibility beside the huge resources which have been poured into Franco-German co-operation since the understanding between General de Gaulle and President Adenauer and which provides for a massive programme of exchanges between young people and of language teaching.

Despite that huge governmental effort to develop Franco-German relations, there is a still larger latent support both in this country and in most parts of France for Anglo-French exchanges and for the learning of our two very dissimilar languages. It is quite right that industry on both sides of the channel, in particular firms that trade extensively in our two countries, should make the major contribution to exchanges from which it derives direct and tangible benefit. Those programmes of exchanges—I can vouch from the happy experience of my own constituency when such exchanges resulted in the twinning of Colwyn with Roissy en Brie—need priming by a judicious injection of funds at the right time and at the right level by Governments.

As I have said, direct Anglo-French relations are a less profitable matter to study than the role that our two countries play in partnership or in rivalry on the European or world stages.

The recent Gulf crisis demonstrated that, despite some differences in assessment in the early stages—differences which, I am sorry to say, were deliberately magnified and distorted by a few in this House and by all too many in the popular press who imagine that they can win cheap popularity by jibes at the French—our two countries are clearly designated as the two leaders. I go so far as to say that they are the only two significant principals in any European activity outside the NATO area. It would be seemly for the British media to acknowledge rather more readily than they do the quite exceptional role that French relief agencies, notably Médecins sans Frontières, are playing in that and similar emergencies.

The mention of NATO reminds me that one of the biggest obstacles to closer defence co-operation between Britain and France—the only two nuclear powers in Europe—namely, French non-participation in the NATO command structure, is beginning at long last to show some slight signs of weakening in practice if not yet in theory. Difficulties between our two countries—sometimes painful difficulties—will continue. The agricultural policy of the European Community has long been and will continue for some years yet to be a fruitful source of quarrel.

Even though the protection of her domestic agriculture has ceased to be the all-dominating political issue in the now highly industrialised France, folk memories die hard. French public opinion did not reprove as sharply as it should have the actions of impoverished and enraged sheep farmers from the stony soil of the south-west who so brutally set fire to a lorryload of live sheep from the overstocked grassy hills of the Welsh countryside.

Clearly, the common agricultural policy will remain for some time yet a source of potential difficulty rather than opportunity for closer co-operation between our two countries. I very much hope that our Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will not rest content with that state of affairs or curry favour in this House or

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

elsewhere by playing up those differences. We need, can get, and to a large extent are getting the close co-operation of the French in the rapid and fundamental evolution of the European Community which is taking place.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I pay tribute to the excellent work that my hon. Friend has done to foster Anglo-French relations. Does he agree that, in development of European political union and European monetary union negotiations, it is striking and interesting to note that the other great ancient nation, France, with its long history, does not appear to fear any loss of sovereignty, as some of our colleagues in the House and perhaps outside do? Those who fear it are a minority. The French believe that, by pursuing further integration in the Community, they will increase their real, practical sovereignty and retain all their powers of decision making.

Sir Anthony Meyer: My hon. Friend's comment prompts two observations. First, the French are realistic about these matters. They clearly understand that the trappings of sovereignty are relatively unimportant and that what matters is the extent to which a country can exercise real influence in the world. Therefore, the French are prepared to accept limitations which may not be far reaching in order to secure more effective co-operation within the European Community.

Secondly, it is welcome that the British Government have recovered and are reasserting freedom of manoeuvre on integration and are prepared, in order to secure vital British objectives, to pay lip service if necessary to ideals which are strongly held on the other side of the channel but which do not excite such support and enthusiasm here. Such ideals matter dearly to our continental partners. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and I have been struck by the way in which the Government are exerting that freedom of action.

There is a great deal of common ground between the British and the French about the structure of the European Community. We should build on that common ground. We are the two nations with the longest natural national histories and the most clearly defined identities. We are the only two nuclear powers in the Community. We are the only two permanent members of the Security Council. We are the two nations which have retained from our previous empires a continuing and well-informed interest in developments in every part of the globe. We two are as well-placed as any nation to strike the right balance between pursuing closer integration in Europe while holding open the door to the newly-free countries of eastern Europe.

France, alone in the EC, straddles the divide between the northern and southern halves of the European Community. Clearly it has a vital role to play in the immediate enlargement of the Community to include the European Free Trade Association countries. So vital is it to ensure that we maximise co-operation between France and Britain at this critical moment that on both sides of the channel we should bite off our tongues before giving vent to petty irritations. It is a stroke of good fortune that at this moment the two countries are represented by two diplomats—Sir Ewen Fergusson in Paris and M. Bernard Dorin in London—for whom better understanding between our two countries is a veritable passion.

I also derive considerable comfort from the presence at the Dispatch Box of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who will reply to the debate.

12.42 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): A considerable time has passed since the House last discussed the important subject of Anglo-French relations, although there was a debate in another place on 18 June last year which coincided with the 50th anniversary of General de Gaulle's historic call to arms from Carlton gardens. I welcome this opportunity to take stock on the anniversary of the defence of Calais in 1940. I am especially pleased, and it is appropriate, that the debate was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), who told us something about the history of his connection with France. Of course, he omitted to tell us that he served with distinction in the second world war and was wounded in northern France. He has spent the whole of his parliamentary career fostering Anglo-French relations through the Franco-British parliamentary group.

It often passes unobserved how many hon. Members on both sides of the House devote a considerable amount of their time and energies to fostering relations between Britain and various parts of the world in which they happen to take an interest, for either constituency or personal reasons. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West is a particularly fine example.

Anglo-French relations have gone from strength to strength in recent years. We have powerful shared interests as members of the United Nations Security Council, as nuclear powers and as members of all the multilateral institutions which affect our interests. There is hardly any subject on which Britain and France do not now consult closely at all levels. The annual summit has developed into a forum for in-depth discussion of issues of real importance, including our mutual defence interests. This year's summit in France will see a continuation of that trend: substance rather than form, the best characteristic of Britain's relationship with France in the 1990s.

There are countless other contacts. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has had two warm and productive meetings with President Mitterrand since last November, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary sees his French counterpart almost as often as his own Cabinet colleagues. There are also many other long-standing historical links, such as those between veterans' associations, and cultural links, such as town twinning and youth exchanges. My hon. Friend referred to the town twinning that involves his constituency and he will be pleased to hear that my constituency, Watford, has an extremely successful town-twinning arrangement with Nanterre, which is just outside Paris. I agree with my hon. Friend that we must do everything that we can to build on these programmes and especially those that enable our young people to move freely between the two countries.

There are also extensive business links. A much more recent development, and one which we welcome, is the secondment of British and French diplomats to their sister ministries across the channel. I hope that the young diplomats who take part in the scheme do not have to wait for as long as my hon. Friend, when he was in Paris, to find

a diplomat who looks after the interests of both Britain and France in the Quai d'Orsay and in our own Foreign Office.

The best-known non-governmental body that is active in the promotion of Anglo-French relations is the Franco-British Council. My hon. Friend is the deputy chairman of the British section. He is an active participant in the council's activities, which have made a significant contribution to Franco-British understanding since its inception in 1972. The Government support the council financially, with a grant of £74,500 in this financial year.

The council has an important role in bringing people together, in breaking down barriers and reducing stereotypes. A meeting last month to analyse the ways in which the British and French media have handled recent events was a good example of that useful activity. My hon. Friend left us in no doubt about the importance of the work carried out in that area. I sometimes think—I dare say that my hon. Friend may agree—that some people who live abroad take certain sections of the British press rather more seriously than we do. Nevertheless, problems can be created for us all.

It is more important than ever that Britain and France should understand each other and work closely together. I am confident that the Franco-British Council will continue its good work to this end which the Government support as a valuable complement to governmental activities.

As permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Britain and France have a role in all major international and regional issues. Both countries contribute in full measure to the deliberations of the Security Council and played a central part in the unprecedented agreement in the international community on the steps needed to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression against Kuwait. We both sent a swift and sizeable military contingent to the multinational coalition which was forced to carry out the task. We are again working closely each day to alleviate the suffering of the Kurds and others who have fled the savage repression in Iraq. Franco-British co-operation over the crisis has been exemplary. During the difficult weeks of the recent past I spoke on several occasions to my French counterparts, including the Minister with responsibility for overseas development, who was a founder of Médecins sans Frontières. I think that we could claim that with the co-operation between France and Britain we led Europe and perhaps influenced the world in dealing with those matters.

A few more examples should suffice to demonstrate the breadth of Anglo-French relations nowadays. Britain and France both contributed substantially to the Paris charter for a new Europe adopted at the CSCE summit in Paris last November, which set the seal on the more co-operative international environment that has taken the place of the cold war. The newly inaugurated European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with its London site and French president, is a further symbol of the close co-operation between our two countries.

Britain and France both gladly gave up their rights and responsibilities as wartime allies following Germany's unification last year. We are both proud of our contribution to that historic event, which for both of us has cemented our partnership with Germany. The completion of the service tunnel across the channel and, yesterday, the first rail tunnel, gave Britain and France a physical link again, for the first time since the ice age. I look forward to the opening of the tunnel on 15 June 1993.

Trade relations between our two countries have shown a remarkable increase in recent years. Britain and France are each other's third-largest export market. Britain's exports to France reached £10·9 billion in 1990, an increase of 15 per cent. over the previous year. French exports to Britain have seen similar increases and the upward trend is continuing. Investment flows in both directions have increased noticeably. France is now by far the most important European investor in the British economy.

Defence and security, as my hon. Friend pointed out, are an important part of the relationship. Our positions, as the only European nuclear powers, and as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, give us a special range of shared interests and responsibilities, in addition to those that we jointly exercise as members of NATO and the Western European Union. We both have global interests and a global outlook and we both maintain a broad spectrum of military capabilities. Our presence together in the Gulf as the major European ground forces co-operating with the United States symbolised how much common ground we share.

Britain and France co-operate at all levels and over a wide range of defence matters. The Government attach great importance to that close collaboration. We worked closely together in the conventional forces in Europe negotiations and share a similar approach to future conventional arms control.

In the nuclear field as well there is regular dialogue across a broad range of issues. We agree with France about the need for a more effective European contribution to our collective defence arrangements. Under the active French presidency of the WEU, which ends next month, we have made progress together in developing some ideas for a stronger European defence identity based on the WEU.

Of course, we do not agree on everything. The United Kingdom and France have different attitudes to integration in NATO, although we hope that one outcome of the NATO review will be fuller participation by all the allies in the defence commitment to the alliance. However, we differ on the longer-term arrangements for European defence. We have urged that the debate in the inter-governmental conference on a common foreign and security policy should focus on substance, rather than mechanisms, but we and the French are at one in considering that the outcome of the various debates in progress this year should be both a reformed alliance and a stronger European pillar.

The Anglo-French summit in May 1990 agreed that there should be

"an enhanced programme of co-operation with particular emphasis on future security arrangements in Europe".

The Prime Minister and President Mitterrand pursued this further when they met in January this year. I am confident that that range of issues will again be on their agenda at this year's summit. We also keep in close touch with the French Government, as with other EC Governments, on progress in the two inter-governmental conferences, to which my hon. Friend referred.

On political union, we share a good deal of common ground. We both, for instance, are very wary of ceding control to the Community, and hence to the Commission,

[Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones]

in areas where we feel it more appropriate for national Governments to operate, either alone or in co-operation with each other. We agree on the overall structure—the architecture—of the "union" that is now under discussion in the inter-governmental conferences. That is, we both see the "union" as something different from, but including, the Community. We are both keen to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Community within that broader European "union".

There is also considerable common ground with the French Government in the inter-governmental conference on economic and monetary union. We are both agreed on the need to strengthen the ecu during the EMU process and on the need to establish some Community monetary institution with real tasks to perform in stage II. We also share the view that any European central bank should operate under political guidelines set by the Council. Even the United Kingdom reserve on participation in stage III —the single currency union—is now accepted by partners, including France. Of course, there is still a great deal to negotiate, but both we and France are working to overcome our differences.

I feel, as I hope that my hon. Friends and other hon. Members feel, that there is a move in Europe, not just from Britain but towards Britain, to accommodate each other and to find common ground rather than emphasising and exacerbating differences. I hope that the British Government have played their part in bringing that about. I know that the French Government have also played a part.

We do not agree on everything, even under the broad heads of agreement. France, like the United Kingdom, is determined to protect her own national interests within the context of closer European co-operation. That is well understood and I am sure that when we are obliged to take a different line in the inter-governmental conference, for instance on questions of European social policy or the timing and content of economic monetary union stage II, differences of view and the reasons for them are well understood by both sides, because of the closer co-operation that we enjoy. We will continue to work constructively in the inter-governmental conference with the French and others for a satisfactory outcome acceptable to all.

We shall work for an outcome that enables the Community to take the necessary steps forward within the union. Those steps are necessary because the success that the Community has achieved through the single market, which the United Kingdom played such a prominent role in bringing about, has made the Community an important trading and economic bloc. Whatever our approach to it —our approach places an emphases on inter-governmental co-operation—we know that an economic bloc of such consequence must develop commensurate political and defence personalities. That is why my right hon. Friend has made proposals for an enhanced common security policy. That is why Britain and France are playing a leading role in discussing how the Western European Union, outside the union itself, can develop a European defence personality that will enable western Europe to defend its economic and strategic interests outside the NATO area.

Relations with France and Germany are at the heart of our European policy. As we move through the inter-governmental conference, the stakes are high but the prize, in terms of the future security, stability and prosperity of our continent, is also high. Productive relations with France and Germany are an important means to that end. Let no one be in any doubt that it is not only desirable but feasible to have good relations with both simultaneously. The vigorous pursuit of British interests does not require us to be permanently at odds with one or other of our partners. I am confident that, with Britain and France working together, we shall succeed in sustaining the objectives that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West, with others of my hon. Friends and, I should like to think, with Opposition Members.

Health and Social Services (Eastbourne)

12.39 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I thank those who have enabled me to speak this morning. I thank also the Minister for the time that she is to give to responding to the debate.

As a Sussex Member of Parliament, and as a keen supporter of Brighton and Hove Albion, may I take one moment to express my good wishes to the team on its success last night in reaching the final of the play-offs. The team will appear at Wembley in June. I wish the management and the players well on that occasion.

This is a very serious debate. When one looks at the figures of those who are waiting for national health service operations in the Eastbourne area, one can only be very surprised indeed. Last September we had 3,938 people on the hospital waiting list, over 1,000 of whom had been waiting for over a year. The position during the last six months—the most recent figures of all are those to March 1991—shows little or no improvement on those figures. Although the Government have encouraged health authorities, in Eastbourne in particular, to reduce the number of people who have been waiting for more than two years, that has been at the cost of those who have been waiting for up to two years. Today we still have 3,900 people on our hospital waiting list.

Perhaps even worse is the position of the notional time that it would take to clear that number of people. If there were no new people requiring hospital surgery and therefore hospital admission, it would take one year and 14 weeks for that number of people to be treated. Of the 191 district health authorities, Eastbourne is the fifteenth worst. We are in the bottom 8 per cent. for performance and for high waiting lists. I understand that the position in the south-east Thames area is the worst in the country. It has six of the worst 16 district health authorities out of the total of 191.

We have also suffered a massive loss of beds. Since 1983 there has been a 36·2 per cent. reduction in the number of beds available in the Eastbourne health authority. That has to be set against a south-east Thames average reduction of 30 per cent. and an all-England average of 21·2 per cent. We have lost a much larger number of beds than other district health authorities. During the October by-election that saw my election to this House, the Conservative candidate tried to claim—and did claim in writing—that we had 200 beds at St. Mary's hospital which, when visited, he could see had been demolished.

Since that occasion in October I have had referred to me a fairly large number of cases, to a few of which I wish to refer. I shall make the full details available to the Minister, but I am sure that she will understand if I refer to them as cases. The first case is Mr. A. Mr. A had been waiting to go into our district general hospital for major surgery for an aneurysm of the aorta—quite a dangerous condition that requires intensive care. Twice he was given a date for admission and twice it was cancelled. One can imagine the stress. On the third occasion he was admitted. He was prepared for surgery but he then had to be sent home, after preparation for surgery, because another emergency required the bed space. One can also imagine the stress on that occasion. The pressure on bed space in the district general hospital is just one of the problems that we face.

The outpatient services, though, fare little better. There have been considerable cuts in joint funding, available with local authorities. The example that I want to give is that of Master Craig. He is a Down's syndrome child. The county has recognised that he has special speech therapy needs, but unfortunately that therapy has had to cease. He was obtaining 30 minutes of therapy each month—itself thought to be inadequate, but at least a help—but that has now been terminated. A letter from the district speech therapy manager of the district's community health services says that speech therapy will no longer be available in this case

"until our funding and staffing levels are increased."

A similar letter from the same speech therapy manager sent to all schools showed that speech therapists would no longer be available to visit schools to assess children. In other words, they would have to be known to have a need or be referred to a clinic by someone else, but it is not clear who.

On a further case I am pleased to say that my late predecessor obtained success during his time as Member of Parliament for Eastbourne. In March 1989 Master W experienced a problem obtaining a replacement for a national health service bone conductor hearing aid. After some months his mother went to the late Ian Gow who managed to secure that replacement by July 1989. At the time, a promise was given that a spare bone conductor hearing aid would be kept at Brighton or Eastbourne. In October 1990 the hearing aid went wrong again and Master W went to Princess Alice hospital in Eastbourne and was told that a replacement would be obtained as soon as possible. There were many telephone calls and many visits and, eventually, early this year, they visited me. By 3 February, some four months after the need arose, Master W received the bone conductor hearing aid that he needed. His mother commented that it came in a very nice case which will never be used and which was a waste of NHS funds.

The answer to those problems and many others that I could have listed is that we need more resources. We need to reduce waiting lists, increase beds and provide a better out-patient service. The response that we are being offered to those problems is an application for trust status. A year ago the majority of consultants, doctors, nurses and other professionals concerned said that they did not want trust status, so the health authority put the application back in the drawer. It has now been brought out again. The health authority consists of a group of unelected people with no mandate. It is claiming that it could increase staff and decrease waiting lists. However, the Minister and I know, because we read and check our facts, that that has not been happening in other parts of the country. We know of the cuts in staffing at Bradford and Guys and we know of the budget-holding general practitioners in Watford who seem to be able to demand a better service than GPs who do not have budget-holding status. Only yesterday I saw in the newspaper that a lady wrote that in her area of Oldham the waiting time for an appointment has increased from two weeks to three months.

The people of Eastbourne want to know whether the future will be better than the present. They want answers to various questions. For example, will trust status enable unelected people with no mandate to sell buildings? Could one of our hospitals be sold and work concentrated on another? Could unlimited private work be accepted? I met the chairman of the group making the trust application

[Mr. David Bellotti]

and he told me that he thought that it could take in extra laundry from Eastbourne to make a profit. Should that be happening, and will it be possible as it would would divert people from their proper tasks? Will those unelected people be able to hire and fire staff without reference to elected bodies or to Government? Will they be able to take people from abroad who can pay more rather than the people in Eastbourne who have great need?

Those questions are in the minds of my constituents now. I have asked the chair of the group making the trust applications whether he will hold a community referendum. He said no. Therefore, I intend to hold such a referendum. I shall be circulating to every household in my constituency the details of the proposals and inviting them to say whether they support them. I shall do that in June so that the results can be made available to the Minister when the application is considered in mid-August. Does the Minister believe that she should abide by the result of the referendum, so that the people of Eastbourne can have a major say in the provision of health services? The service is far too big to be made a political football; we should listen to local people.

I want to deal now with related health matters, some of which come under the social services department. There are more people over 75 in east Sussex than in any other social service provider in England. Eastbourne has a large proportion of over 75s, and indeed of over 85s. There is a great need for residential care, especially nursing homes. In Eastbourne, the number of private nursing home beds increased from 1,065 in 1984 to 1,411 in 1990. That is a cause for much concern, unless Government grants enable those places to be maintained. Fears were expressed only this week to the Select Committee on Social Security that funds might not be made available to support those people.

There are many mentally handicapped people in Eastbourne, because it is a nice place to live and the quality of life is high. I recently visited an excellently run private home for mentally handicapped people, the Heatherdene. It is concerned about funding for individuals in its care.

Linden Court in Eastbourne is a training centre for mentally handicapped people, but cuts in social security benefit have led to concern about not only residential places but the buying power of people in contributing to that establishment.

A deaf mentally handicapped child has attended Hazel Court school in Eastbourne for the past four years, having moved from Hackney. He is now becoming an adult but wishes to continue with the adult training that is available at Linden Court. The county council has said that Hackney must pay his costs of £200 per week and £35 a week for a taxi. He having lived in east Sussex for four years, one would have thought that the council could meet the bill. His mother described the decision as heartless and uncaring and asked how can we expect Hackney to contribute.

Just before Christmas, I tried to raise with East Sussex county council the saga of a residential home called Milton Court. In late September, county councillors were promised that a report on care in that home would be made on 11 October. In early October, I met a man who had been transferred from a day centre at the residential home to another day centre, having been told that it was to close. No report was tabled at the social services meeting on 11 October, but staff had been sent a letter saying that their jobs would cease and asking whether they would transfer elsewhere. There was no matching joint finance from the district health authority for the future intentions for that home.

The county council has much responsibility in this matter. Councillors were not told the truth. They were told that investigations with a local housing association might be brought forward. Unfortunately for the county council, the previous day I had attended a meeting with the housing association, which had told me it had only just received a letter asking whether that might be possible, and of course it was not. The funding from the district health authority was not going to be sufficient to carry out that project. The county councillors were not told what would happen in Milton Court and, in the meantime, the staff were given letters of dismissal. The staff were also told by the director of social services not to speak to councillors. That does not seem the way to plan for care in the community.

There were also proposals earlier this year to close eight residential homes in east Sussex. The number of beds in the county is to decrease from 1,212 to 772, a loss of 440. In the editorial in our local *Evening Argus* the editor summed up the position well when he said:

"East Sussex has one of the highest percentages of old people in the country and the numbers of those aged 85 plus are rising. The suspicion is that there simply may not be enough homes for those who cannot cope by the mid 1990s."

Into that scenario the county council recently announced the closure of another residential home in Eastbourne, St. Anthony's Court. To save just £138,000 a year the council plans to close an absolutely wonderful home. The home has a friends' organisation to raise money for extras. I recently attended a fun day at which two local primary schools sang and provided entertainment for those who live there. The staff are superb and the buildings are perfect, yet the county council wishes to sell the home.

The pressures on Eastbourne will not decrease because homes in adjacent towns such as Hastings and Peacehaven will also be sold. The reduction of 440 residential care places is to fund an additional 179 day care places. The equation does not add up. Our care in the community strategy, which we want to put in place for 1993, will require more day care and respite care places and the loss of residential care places will scupper that policy.

The management of social services in east Sussex has not been good, but recently it has become chronic. Last year it overspent by £1·6 million without telling any of the councillors. It is closing many homes and has appointed at high level many additional top managers but very few grass-roots social workers. The Minister should investigate the social services department in east Sussex and especially the actions of the chairman of the social services committee, Councillor Pat Wright, and the director, Mr. Nicholas Holbrook. If she does not, the strategy for community care will be scuppered.

There have been no Government funds to plan community care. The threat now faced by local authorities, which will have community care responsibility devolved to them in 1993 and which will also have the possibility—no, the probability—of massive local government reorganisation in 1994, is a recipe for chaos, for

confusion and for poor standards. Local government needs to know where it is going and it needs to have the resources.

Some essential services will fall between stools. Will the Government give some assurances about authorities, such as East Sussex, that want to plan over a five or 10-year period on "in" and "out" packages? The promises made today must hold for the future.

An example of a service that will fall between stools because the planning is not there for it is the drug misuse service. In Eastbourne, there are three voluntary organisations—the Libra Trust, the Seaside Centre, run by the Young Men's Christian Association, and Open Door. They provide, with grant aid, support for young people who have a drugs problem. Will the trust that is proposed for Eastbourne district general hospital and the community care plan which will come into force for the county council in 1993 take on board the need for grants for those bodies? I fear that they may not.

Eastbourne has unique challenges. We need answers and action, not ideas which are not welcome and which do not inspire local confidence. The health and well-being of our community is at stake. The people whom I represent need and deserve to know what the Government intend to do to help them.

1.19 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on seeking this opportunity to discuss the health and welfare needs of his constituency. However, I was disappointed by his biased and lopsided account because, before coming to this debate, I studied the situation in his area. In his discussion of health and welfare, he singularly failed to draw attention to a group that is doing outstandingly well in Eastbourne—the general practitioners. I am pleased to report to the hon. Gentleman that 88 per cent. of his general practitioners reached the higher target—the 90 per cent. target—for child immunisation and that 70 per cent. of them reached the higher target—the 90 per cent. target—for cervical cytology. That is one of many examples.

In East Sussex, there has been a substantial drop in the number of patients whom each GP has to look after. There has been a big increase in the number of practice staff. On the basis of the new GP contract, GPs are clearly providing an excellent service for patients.

I began by mentioning the family practitioner services because they are often the basic building blocks of not only our hospital services but our social services. I was enormously impressed on 12 February when I asked Councillor Pat Wright, the chairman of the social services committee, who seemed to me to have done an excellent job, together with the first-rate director of East Sussex social services, Nicholas Holbrook, and a councillor from Eastbourne borough council to speak to me and to take me through the practical steps that they were already taking to implement care in the community. In many respects, they are ahead of others, especially in their work to co-ordinate their proposals with housing authorities and in integrating their plan with health authorities.

The hon. Gentleman began with the question of waiting lists. It is a fortuitous circumstance that his debate should coincide with today's report by the Select Committee on Health on waiting lists. The hon. Gentleman is one of the first to learn that, today, we are able to announce the most dramatic improvement in the number of patients who have been waiting an unacceptable length of time. There has been a 38 per cent. fall in the number waiting over two years and a 19 per cent. fall in the number of patients waiting over a year. The hon. Gentleman and I will both agree that it is unacceptable for patients to wait for such long periods. However, I must make it clear that one patient in two is admitted immediately. The judgment on hospital admission is based on clinical priority. The average for patients who are not admitted immediately is five weeks. The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the need for further progress in his health authority, as in others, on cutting down the number of those waiting.

In Eastbourne health authority, there has been an excellent advance in cutting down. There has been a 61 per cent. decrease in the two-year waiters. We want there to be more progress, and to help this year, as well as the increase of funding for the health authority of over £12 million in one year alone—going from £59 million to over £71 million in 1991-92 to spend on the health care of people in Eastbourne—there is additional funding from the region of £186,000 which is intended to help especially with the waiting lists for ear, nose and throat treatment, oral surgery, urology and gynaecology, which are important areas of progress and activity.

This year, we are spending about £60 million through the regions. We are making it clear that we must bring down the number of patients who wait for unacceptable periods. Today's excellent news on the progress made over the past year is a heartening first step.

The hon. Gentleman fell into the trap, as so many other hon. Members have done, of referring to the number of beds as an indicator of care. That is a naive approach, whether applied to care in the community or to hospitals. Increasing numbers of us can now receive support on a domiciliary basis in the community or day care. Reports from authoritative sources constantly stress the importance of moving towards more day care. I am pleased that the hospitals in the hon. Gentleman's area have been able to increase the number of patients treated—even at a time when they were rationalising bed use.

The hon. Gentleman went on to discuss the concept of the Eastbourne hospitals trust. I have already seen, and am most impressed by, the prospectus that has been produced. Over the next three months, it will be the subject of consultation with the people of Eastbourne because it is important that they should know and understand. The hon. Gentleman talked about the strengths and weaknesses of ballots and referendums. The key point is that these are complex issues on which people need to have an informed and reasoned discussion. Scaremongering and doom and gloom can play no part. When the Secretary of State decides whether to approve the Eastbourne hospitals trust, in his mind will be purely and simply the question whether that is a better way of managing the health service to improve the care of patients —national health service patients. That is the aim, objective and pride of our national health service.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the trust would be free to undertake private work. We have no vendetta against the private sector. Many people wish to spend their resources on private health care. But the aim, objective and commitment of national health service Ministers, the management executive and the national health service trusts is to pioneer, develop and improve the quality of

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

national health service work. The hospitals may admit private patients or patients from overseas. We have no objection to that. But our criterion, aim and objective is that it should be done to improve the care of national health service patients.

The hon. Gentleman asked about income generation —whether the trust could use the plant in the hospital to provide laundry services. That is a matter for the trust to consider. But its goal, its mission, its purpose in being, is to provide national health service work. That is the key to the national health service trusts.

The sort of policy objectives that we are considering are already taking off in Eastbourne. I have looked at some of the criteria established in the contracts between the purchaser authority, the commissioner, the Eastbourne health authority and the existing provider units. The criteria state that residents who are mentally handicapped shall be consulted in all aspects of their health or welfare. They state that acute patients must have an individual care plan with specific aims for care and at least a daily comment on their progress. They state that, on discharge, the general practitioners should be informed within one week of the recommendations for the patient. Those are the quality objectives to which we are committed and which our national health service reforms are already achieving.

The hon. Gentleman referred to care in the community. He spoke about resources in relation to drawing up preparations for the care in the community provisions. I urge him to consider the evidence. The increase in the social service spending that we have recognised this year is of the order of 23·5 per cent. That is the largest single increase in social service spending for 15 years.

The hon. Gentleman referred to specific aspects of care in the community. For the first time, we are to have a drug and alcohol specific grant allowing spending to the order of £2 million for voluntary organisations—precisely the organisations to which the hon. Gentleman referred. What about the new work for the mentally ill? The specific grant, allowing £30 million worth of spending, will result in East Sussex receiving £330,000 towards its work for the mentally ill—a very important group. What about the money specifically for training for community care? This year, we substantially increased the amount that goes towards training those in social services for this important and popular development.

East Sussex has received £220,000 towards training social service staff so that they are properly and effectively prepared for the implementation of this important policy. The authority is working hard to ensure that the needs of the frail and vulnerable—those who are entitled to an effective quality of care in the community—are met. That will take time and detailed planning. Next year's plan, which is subject to consultation, will be a further and important springboard for progress.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne should have no doubt about the commitment and concern of those involved in social services and health care. If the hon. Gentleman is tempted to suggest that his party has reservations about national health service trusts, he should contact Councillor Marian Border. She is a Liberal Democrat councillor and a non-executive member of the Freeman Group of Hospitals NHS trust in Newcastle. We believe that that is a way of using the resources more effectively and powerfully to provide better patient care. It will be subject to consultation and detailed consideration before the final plans are announced in Eastbourne. I have been impressed by and warmly congratulate those people who have pioneered service improvements for the people of Eastbourne.

Deep-mine Coal Industry (Lothian)

1.30 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The Government have a responsibility to ensure that this country has an energy industry which meets our short-term needs and ensures that in the long run we will not have to depend on imported energy. For those and other reasons, I believe that Energy Ministers should be concerned about Monktonhall colliery in Lothian.

Scotland is an energy-rich country. We have nuclear and hydro-electric power, offshore oil and gas and the coal industry. However, it must be accepted that we will depend on our coal industry long after the oil and gas have run dry. There is therefore an important strategic reason why we should protect the long-term future of our deep-mine coal industry in Scotland—an industry which has been reduced to the single Longannet complex.

We were reminded today of the severity of the balance of payments deficit. At the bottom of the recession, it was announced today that there was a balance of payments deficit in March of more than £300 million. Surely the Government accept that it is only common sense to take decisions intended to reduce our balance of payments deficit in the long term rather than to exacerbate them.

It is worth recalling that, while we are now struggling to break even in our energy balance of payments, as recently as 1985 we had a surplus of more than £6 billion on our energy balance of payments. I hope that that gives some idea of the huge potential of our energy industry and, in particular, our coal industry for the balance of payments if the Government are prepared to accept some responsibility for ensuring that the right decisions are taken.

It is not just those important strategic questions that affect the economy and the coal industry. The decision to reopen Monktonhall colliery is crucial to the Scottish economy. We now have only the Longannet pit, which is operating very efficiently, as no doubt the Minister will confirm later. Output in the Scottish economy fell last year by 9 per cent. Unemployment was high and is now rising significantly. Against that background, and during a recession, there must be a strong case for encouraging a nationalised industry such as British Coal to invest in the Scottish economy. A decision to invest in Monktonhall would give a very important boost to the local economy in Lothian. A boost in investment—although not a huge investment—is required to bring the pit back into production. There would be a boost also in terms of the creation of direct jobs in the mine and also indirect jobs and in terms of the additional local purchasing power that would be generated in the local economy as a result of those jobs. That project is very important for the Lothian economy.

The Secretary of State for Scotland himself has acknowledged that the Government have a responsibility and that it stems partly from the concern that any Government should have for the future of the Scottish economy. So that there is no misunderstanding, I shall quote from a letter dated 8 May 1991 from the Secretary of State to the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. He stated:

"I am well aware of the strength of feeling surrounding the possible redevelopment of these mines, particularly Monktonhall. Indeed, a number of independent proposals to this end have been brought to my attention. For this reason I recently wrote to John Wakeham in view of his responsibility for coal policy throughout Great Britain."

I hope that, if nothing else, that demonstrates that the Government have a responsibility and cannot simply wash their hands and suggest that all such decisions should be taken on a short-term basis by British Coal.

The Minister will be aware of the campaign that has been mounted to secure the reopening of Monktonhall. A very important document called "Monktonhall Colliery—The case for revival" was produced collectively by Lothian regional council, the Midlothian district council, East Lothian district council, and the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area. The campaign has widespread support throughout Scotland and the support of Labour Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), who has a deep and long-standing interest in the industry, would have liked to participate in the debate.

The tradition of coal mining in the Lothians goes back hundreds of years. I have had the privilege, as you probably know, Madam Deputy Speaker, of representing Edinburgh, East for almost 21 years. When I was first elected, quite a number of collieries were operating in Lothian. Latterly there are two collieries, Bilston Glen and Monktonhall—two large pits employing more than 1,000 men. If my memory serves me rightly, Bilston Glen employed almost 2,000 men not so long ago. Bilston Glen is now closed and all that is left is Monktonhall, which has been retained on a care-and-maintenance basis.

Let us be quite clear about what happened at Monktonhall. When Monktonhall was put on a care-and-maintenance basis, British Coal invested £14 million in new workings to open the Peacock seam, an important area of reserves which are accessible from the Monktonhall colliery. A total of 9 million tonnes of coal reserves are readily accessible from Monktonhall colliery at present. There are probably another 40 million tonnes of reserves that can be accessed from the colliery. That does not include the important reserves under Musselburgh bay. Before the redrawing of the parliamentary boundaries in 1983, I had the privilege of representing Musselburgh. We had a long discussion and argument about the siting of a satellite shaft in Musselburgh which would have allowed the men to reach the coal at Musselburgh bay, but the coal was to be brought up at Monktonhall colliery.

There is no doubt that if we can get through the short-term crisis for the deep-coal mining industry in Lothian, the Monktonhall pit will probably be in operation for another 100 years—that is no exaggeration—because of the scale of reserves. It was always said by the old National Coal Board that the reserves under Musselburgh bay had tremendous potential and undoubtedly could be exploited profitably in the long run. Nothing in the document to which I referred or the argument relates to the reserves under Musselburgh bay. The powerful case that has been mounted is based on the reserves that can be accessed from the Monktonhall colliery at present.

I accept that the decision whether to resume production, in particular under the Government's policies—I do not try to make a party point—is not only based on long-term strategic lessons. There must be a short-term market for the coal. However, all the evidence shows that there is a market for the coal.

[Mr. Gavin Strang]

I do not wish to rely too heavily on the analysis in the document to which I referred. Various analyses have been made. But, unlike a few years ago, there are several positive developments on the likely demand for coal in Scotland. First, there is a good prospect—perhaps the Minister will comment on it—that the undersea cable that will enable Scottish Power to supply electricity to Northern Ireland will go ahead. The signs are that we are likely to have a positive decision on that in the near future.

Secondly, I assume that the interconnector between Scotland and England will be upgraded. It was upgraded previously but a doubling of capacity is now planned. I believe that that should go ahead as quickly as possible. I suspect that, if it had not been for privatisation, the upgrading would have been further ahead by now. It will enable additional electricity to flow from Scotland to England. In previous years there have been disputes between the electricity and the coal industries, but Scottish Power is now well pleased with the competitive coal supplied to it by British Coal.

It would be a mistake to assume that in the long run the necessary coal can be supplied from opencast mining. Of course, opencast mining has a contribution to make. However, British Coal has to be reminded, especially as responsibility for its opencast operations has been transferred from Scotland to the English headquarters and the operations are conducted on a Great Britain basis, that over many years there has been an unwritten political agreement between the mostly Labour-controlled local authorities in Scotland and the coal industry that councils would take a favourable and sympathetic view of opencast developments on the understanding that some of the economic benefits would be transferred to the deep-mine coal industry. British Coal may be in danger of understating the significance of that unwritten agreement.

It is fair to say that nothing like the controversy and difficulty that has arisen in England over opencast mining planning applications has been caused in Scotland. There are real problems with opencast mining. The Minister will know more about that than me from his ministerial experience and his knowledge of the position in England. However, it would be unwise for British Coal to think that its outlined ambitious plans for future opencast working in Scotland can go ahead smoothly if it does not give some indication of a commitment to deep-mine coal. An early and necessary sign of that commitment is a positive decision on Monktonhall colliery.

Growing importance has been given in recent years to low-sulphur coal. One might argue that that has been one of the most important developments since Monktonhall colliery ceased production in 1987. A premium is now put on high-quality and low-sulphur coal. The privatised English generating authorities have emphasised the growing importance that they attach to low-sulphur coal. One of the great strengths of Monktonhall coal is that it has one of the lowest sulphur contents in Great Britain and is potentially a high-quality coal.

For the reasons that I have given, there is a powerful, long-term strategic case for resuming production at Monktonhall, and, given a positive approach, a commercial case can be made for doing so, even though British Coal has not previously accepted that case. There are grounds for optimism that the commercial circumstances are such that in the years ahead the output from Monktonhall will find a market and can be produced profitably by British Coal or whoever operates the colliery.

It is no exaggeration to say that, if British Coal decided to write off the colliery, it would be an act of industrial vandalism. British Coal is committed to taking a decision next month. It is within its power to stop the pumps, to allow the colliery to be flooded and to write off a huge investment. In so doing it would sterilise reserves of tremendous potential that would continue into the next century. Huge investment would be written off, including £14 million which British Coal invested even after the colliery had ceased production. Surely such action is unthinkable.

The easy option for British Coal, of continuing care and maintenance, would contribute nothing to the local economy in the short term. The local community would be greatly disappointed if that option were taken. Jobs are needed in the area and the community is looking for them. If there were a resumption of production—I shall not say what the scale of the initial production should be, and it might not be as great as some might want originally—we would have the chance to prove that the colliery could operate extremely efficiently and competitively and that there was a market for its coal. I would hope that output could gradually be increased.

I quoted a letter that the Secretary of State for Scotland wrote to the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Campbell Christie. Ministers have put it on record that there have been approaches from interests in the private sector which wish to acquire and operate the colliery. Probably there are about five consortia, including the Monktonhall miners' consortium of local miners, who want to operate as a sort of co-operative. Various interests have all expressed a wish to operate the colliery.

It is not an accident that British Coal invested in Monktonhall after it had ceased production. Care and maintenance has continued. British Coal always recognised that the colliery had tremendous potential. If British Coal is not prepared to operate the colliery, surely the Government will insist that it is not written off for the long term. Surely they will insist that British Coal sells the asset to a private company or consortium. It is not for me to comment on the relative merits of the organisations which have expressed an interest. It is important, however, to put on record that private consortia have declared an interest. If British Coal is not prepared to operate the colliery, it is the overwhelming view of the local community that it must accept its responsibility to the nation and sell the asset to a private company, on the understanding that it will reopen the colliery and bring it back into production.

There is an abundance of mining skills in Lothian. Some men with a wide range of experience at the pit have not worked since it was closed. There are others who have expertise that is related to the mining operation. From the point of view of local Labour Members, the local authorities, unions and miners, the best outcome of the review that British Coal is carrying out would be for British Coal to decide to reopen the colliery and to restart production. If it took that step, there would be tremendous support and good will within the community. I am confident that if British Coal were to take that bold decision next month, its boldness would be rewarded by competitive production following the reopening of a colliery with a long future.

1.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) spoke candidly about the potential for the Scottish coal mining industry and about the future of Monktonhall in particular. I share his optimism about the future, but it would be wrong if we did not temper that hope with realism about the formidable challenges that the industry faces.

Those challenges are not new. The hon. Gentleman will know that British coal mining output peaked in 1913 at not far short of 300 million tonnes a year. Since then, the industry has had to contract to meet market demands. The reason for that is obvious if we consider that before the war there were huge markets for domestic coal, railway coal, for bunkering ships and so on. Even as late as 1950, British Coal was supplying 38 million tonnes simply for the domestic market. Today's sales of domestic coal are just under 5 million tonnes and of course we do not use coal for railway transport or making town gas. So the industry has had to go through a period of substantial restructuring and now coal faces competition from gas, the nuclear industry and so on.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about imports. As members of the European Community and as signatories to the GATT arrangements, we could not operate a protectionist policy, even if we wanted to do so. I agree with him that Britain, and Scotland in particular, has substantial fuel reserves and an impressive diversity of fuel sources, but it would be wrong to protect that market artificially and to exclude imported energy as a matter of course. That would be a recipe for inefficiency and British industry generally would not be well served by a policy that exposed it to excessively expensive electricity prices simply to protect one energy industry.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East also spoke of the potential for exporting electricity from Scotland and I am aware of the need to strengthen the interconnector to England. But that, again, needs competitive Scottish power. I think that the industries concerned can rise to the challenge and the restructuring of the electricity industry and placing it in the private sector has helped to create a competitive market in electricity which enables British Coal and the Scottish generating companies to look forward to exporting their power to other parts of the United Kingdom.

There are formidable challenges ahead and they have been met in the recent past. The Government have been generous in helping British Coal to meet the cost involved. Since 1979, we have provided £17 billion worth of grant aid to enable British Coal to restructure, in conditions that have avoided the need for any compulsory redundancies, and any miners wishing to redeploy to other parts of the mining industry have been able to do so.

In Scotland, those challenges were faced earlier than in most of the rest of the United Kingdom. The restructuring there was difficult, but was achieved somewhat earlier. The Scottish energy market is particularly competitive. The hon. Gentleman mentioned offshore oil and gas and nuclear and Scotland is well placed for the development of alternative energy sources such as wind power.

Longannet colliery is successfully producing coal today in a way that shows what can be done with good management, good investment and the commitment and enthusiasm of a highly motivated work force. Longannet is a low-cost, highly productive pit which stands comparison with any in Europe.

Restructuring has not been painless, but the redundancy terms have, at least since 1979, ensured that those leaving the industry have done so with generous terms to cushion them during the difficult changes from working in the coal industry to working in other employment or taking early retirement.

That is the background against which the coal industry must operate and against which any decision about Monktonhall must be taken. It is for the industry, which at the moment means British Coal, to decide what its manpower requirements are. It must also, as it has already started to do, change its culture from one that attempts to retain market share at all costs to one that seeks a market share based on competition and reduction of costs to a level from which it can compete against other energy sources. The 90 per cent. increase in productivity that the industry has achieved since 1985 is impressive and shows what can be achieved. If that pace of productivity improvement can be kept up, I too am optimistic about the future.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, British Coal has the stewardship of the nation's coal resources. Under the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946, it is responsible for the efficient development of the industry in the public interest. It is charged with the task of determining where the public interest lies. Decision on access to, and exploitation of, reserves has always been a matter for British Coal, based on its assessment of market prospects. We wish to change that. As we have announced, after the next election we intend to privatise the coal industry and alter the statutory framework. That will create new opportunities for operators, companies, consortia and co-operatives of all sorts to mine coal. At present, however, the statutory framework remains that set out in the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946.

Mothballing is not an easy option for deep mines. It is also an expensive option. Monktonhall is costing British Coal £500,000 a year because it has to be kept dry and the roads have to be kept open. However, it is not true that reserves are lost permanently if a mine is closed. Sometimes they can be accessed from a neighbouring pit, as has happened before. British Coal has given assurances that the pit shafts and road ways are being kept open properly.

I agree that, if British Coal decides that it does not wish to reopen and work the pit, it should give proper consideration to whether the mineworkers' consortium or the other interested groups should be given the opportunity to work it. We have encouraged the consortium and other interested parties to put their proposals direct to British Coal. I want British Coal to take an early decision. It would be wrong for it to sit for too long on this opportunity without giving others a chance to exploit the reserves if it believes that it is not in its interests to do so.

Therefore, I undertake, in the light of the hon. Member's remarks to write to the chairman of British Coal drawing his attention to the debate and expressing my hope that a decision will shortly be reached. I do not dispute the status of British Coal. It must make the assessment in the light of market circumstances and its requirements. If, however, other people decide that they

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

can make a success of it—that they can mine the coal economically and sell it at a profit—they should be given the chance to do so.

Noise Pollution

1.59 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to bring again to the attention of the House the problem of noise—in particular, the problem of noisy parties and the noise created by individuals, mainly in the towns and cities of our country.

The House will remember that on 31 October 1990 we debated the subject at some length and discussed comprehensively the problems caused by noise. I intend to concentrate now on a very wide subject—the problems caused by individuals who seem totally bereft of any feeling for their fellow citizens and neighbours.

At that time in October—and before that date—we had available to us an excellent White Paper from the Department of the Environment. We also had available to us the Batho report—a Government working party report—on noise nuisance. Since then, the Environmental Protection Bill has been passed, part of which takes into account the problem to which I wish to draw the attention of the House.

It is particularly apt that the debate should take place at this time when my postbag and, I suggest, those of many hon. Members are beginning to reflect concern about noise as summer approaches. People remember the last two summers, which were long, hot and dry. Due to parties in and around our towns, noise nuisance increased. An interesting press article recently suggested that my hon. Friend the Minister was considering a fresh approach to the problem. Since last October's debate, he has had time to reflect upon it. His Department has issued a few directives and suggestions which I believe will help us to combat this terrible nuisance. It is pertinent to point out that the complaints about noise that local authorities have received increased tenfold during the past year. Only the dog problem comes close to that. I believe that that was aired earlier today.

It is pertinent to ask exactly what the problem is. I believe that there are two aspects to it. First, there is the noise caused by noisy parties. Inevitably, they are linked in the minds of the public with blues parties. In some cases, they are illegal, under recent legislation passed by the House. People are asked to pay to go to parties that are held outside the law. They are also asked to go to parties that take place on an ad hoc basis.

The tragedy of these events is that they do not occur for just one or two hours. Many go on for several days. I fear that during the coming weekend—a bank holiday weekend—a party might begin in my constituency tomorrow, Friday, and last at least until Monday. That will be a terrible nuisance for those who have to put up with the party and also for those who are not invited to it.

Many hundreds of people are likely to attend such parties. The way they behave and the nuisance that they cause should be of great concern to us all. It needs to be said—although I am sensitive on the issue because of the criticism that came as a result of the speech that I made in the House last October—that part of the problem arises in towns where there is a large Caribbean influence. That is the case in my constituency. Those of Caribbean origin tend to enjoy loud music rather more than the rest of us do. Their style of music is not particularly accommodating to those who live in close neighbourhoods. Also,

regrettably, attached to some of those parties—only a minority—are activities such as drug taking and fornication. That is not my evidence but that of my constituents, and I bring it to the House's attention on that basis. There is concern that those communities tend to dominate lives in certain neighbourhoods with customs that are alien to those of Anglo-Saxon origin. It is a tiny majority, but the problem must be recognised and cannot easily be put under the carpet.

Those parties do not take place in warehouses outside towns or far away from residential areas. They tend to take place in tower blocks, of which there are several in my constituency. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) has had similar problems in his constituency. They tend to take place in close communities and, therefore, the nuisance they cause is doubled. If there is a party on, for example, the sixth floor of a tower block with loud music—one must not underestimate how loud the music can be—with scores of people attending, the nuisance extends throughout the tower block and adjoining blocks. It is a terrible problem.

There is also the problem caused by noisy individuals, some of which is deliberate. Last week I received a letter from one of my constituents who has problems with his neighbours. That is not unusual as many hon. Members receive such correspondence. Sometimes music is deliberately turned up to annoy neighbours. There is no doubt that ghetto-blasters played in the vicinity of others can cause extreme problems. Certain individuals seem content to enjoy themselves throughout the night to the annoyance of their neighbours. There are also instances of people deliberately turning up their television sets to annoy their neighbours. We must bear in mind that many of these events occur in tenements and council blocks with thin walls.

There is also the problem of car noise. High-powered cars may be revved up late at night, youngsters may roar up and down the street and music may be played loudly causing many problems for the neighbours.

On a minor scale, there is the problem of the do-it-yourself enthusiast. On occasions they seem to believe that they should be boring holes in the wall at 3 o'clock in the morning. Such persons may be doing admirable things to improve their own facilities, and I am aware that some facilities do need improving, but there are better times to do it.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I do not look like—nor am I—a do-it-yourself man. I believe that there should be a chap with his name on his ladders. However, as my hon. Friend will know, there are self-build housing groups which need to work and can only work at weekends or in the evenings. Will my hon. Friend comment on those housing groups and on the curtailment of their activities being imposed by some over-enthusiastic local authorities? Those groups build perhaps 30 or 40 houses, not one or two. We should also include those chaps who want to build their own house and live in a caravan while doing so.

Mr. Carlisle: I sympathise with what my hon. Friend has said. Nobody would wish to lessen the enthusiasm of the do-it-yourself enthusiasts or the self-build housing groups. However, my hon. Friend will know that they have to obtain permission from the local authority, as do others, and if they are carrying out commercial work they have to obtain permission about hours. If any legislation is to be framed or any directive controls are to be imposed, they must take full account of those who go about their business legitimately and in a neighbourly way. My hon. Friend will agree that such people are not deliberately provocative—they just want to get on with a job that they have to do out of hours.

It is probably true to say that almost every hon. Member who, like myself, represents large urban areas has received complaints about noise. In last October's debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) outlined the problems faced by residents in city areas.

The message from that debate and from my constituents is that they seem powerless to act. The problem is that those who commit unneighbourly acts are not stopped by the various remedies that are available. Those remedies vary. The first and obvious one is for a report to be made to the local environmental health officer. Assuming that his office is open at night—many of these problems occur in the early hours of the morning—he will send an officer to answer the complaint. When the officer arrives on the scene, having ascertained what is going on and perhaps confirming the trouble, he offers the organiser of the party or the perpetrator of the noise 30 minutes' grace.

I am sure that environmental health officers will agree that the problem is identifying the organiser of the party. One can picture an environmental health officer, or his deputy, arriving at a party of 300 heaving bodies on the seventh floor of a tower block in Luton and trying to ascertain who organised it. The notice of abatement must be served on that person, who then has 30 minutes to turn the noise down. In most cases they do so, but when the officer disappears the music is turned up and the problem persists and sometimes worsens.

Often, environmental health departments will ask for witnesses. The problem is that people are reluctant to report on their neighbours. Hon. Members all have experience of that.

If legal action is taken, it is two or three months before the case gets to court, by which time the problem may have disappeared or have been forgotten by the public. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise that the problem of identification is important.

The second remedy is for people to go to the police. It is a sad fact that in England the police have no power because making a noise is not a criminal offence. That is the nub of the problem. In many instances, the police will attend but do not have the manpower to prevent the party from continuing. They are often reluctant to go into a party of many people, who may be highly intoxicated, perhaps on drugs and, to put it kindly, in a boisterous mood. It has been reported to me that police have sat outside waiting in their cars. I fully understand their reluctance, especially where the party, as I said earlier, is of a Caribbean nature.

The police, who are sensitive and anxious to maintain racial harmony, are reluctant to break up such a party because of what might ensue if they do so. One must feel for young officers who are sent to deal with such an "offence"—I say that although it is not a criminal offence to cause much noise—only to find on arrival that they are severely outnumbered. I can understand the police being reluctant and somewhat fearful to intervene in some cases because of the lack of manpower.

[Mr. Carlisle]

Another option which has been promoted by my hon. Friend and his Department—and by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside in the previous debate—is to try to create a form of neighbourhood noise scheme. That idea sounds attractive and I know that some work has been done on it, but I fear that although such a scheme would probably work well in the nice suburban areas of some towns, it would not be much good in tower blocks with many hundreds of flats. It is unlikely that one could ever get people together to take on board a curfew or whatever was decided by the local community. It is a nice idea which would work in some areas, but I regret that it would not work in parts of my constituency because I personally know of some individuals who would take no notice of such a scheme.

The last remedy, which I have tried to use on some occasions, is to go to the local borough housing manager or to the committee if the people involved are council tenants and to ask if they are breaking their tenancy agreement by causing a nuisance. In some cases, the borough council is sympathetic, but there is a problem if the people are moved to another area and the noise springs up again. I do not believe—though I stand to be corrected—that the borough council would be able under the law to sever a tenancy unless the people were deliberately flouting their particular agreement.

The problem is that people who are afflicted by such parties and such noise have very little remedy to enable them to escape and to get things put right. Following the debate and in addition to the initiatives taken by the Department, there are other actions that we must take.

First, we must have the power, whether through the police, environmental health officers or anyone else, to stop such parties immediately or to stop the people making the noise. The 30 minutes' grace is nonsense, as is having to wait for court action. It must be possible to stop the party immediately if it is causing a nuisance to other people. Secondly, it must be a criminal offence to make such noise. There is no doubt that on some occasions the nuisance is terrible, as proved by the sad letters that we have all had, especially from old people. It must be made a criminal offence if people persist in making such a nuisance of noise to their neighbours.

Thirdly, the police must have the power, if necessary, to confiscate the equipment immediately. That would at least stop the immediate problem and might stop any future problem unless further equipment were purchased. However, such equipment is very expensive. Fourthly, everyone who attends a very loud party must be involved if arrests are made, as is the case in a pub serving drinks after hours. There must be more of a community responsibility to stop this terrible nuisance.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in his Budget speech that the great scourge of modern times was the noise emanating from mobile phones in rather plush London restaurants. I must say, with respect, that he knows nothing about the noise that emanates from parties in my constituency and from those in many other towns and cities. The scourge of noise and nuisance during the next few summer months will be terrible for many people in my constituency. It is the Government's duty to encourage any measure to combat that nuisance and at least to make people's lives a little more worth living.

2.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) has done the House a service by drawing to its attention his concerns and those of his constituents relating to the problems of noise. As my hon. Friend reminded the House, the problems of noise and Government plans for tackling them were the subject of a wide-ranging and thorough Adjournment debate last October. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for providing this opportunity to review progress since. I note from re-reading the official record of that debate that my hon. Friend spoke about particular concerns for him and for his constituents, including noise resulting from road-widening schemes and from noisy parties. Today, he has, for reasons that he explained, concentrated on noisy parties and I will shortly deal with his points.

Whether the problems are specific to Luton or nationwide, the Government fully understand the concern about noise which, although invisible, can be one of the most potent forms of pollution in its ability to irritate and to create stress in all our lives. It is important that people should feel confident that the problem is being tackled and mitigated. The Government have an important role in ensuring that the framework for doing so exists. We are taking action in many ways to mitigate the pollution of noise.

The Government's present policy initiative commenced with the setting up of an independent noise review chaired by James Batho. Its report was published together with our initial response last October.

Since last October's debate, part III of the Environmental Protection Bill has been enacted and the maximum fine for breach of a noise abatement order on trade or business premises has been substantially increased. We also took the opportunity to amend the Bill to give effect to one recommendation that we knew would emerge from the noise review and we clarified the duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to investigate complaints. In addition to the review and the Environmental Protection Act, we published the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" during the same period. It has a chapter on noise and a good deal of the noise review working party's thinking is in it.

However, my hon. Friend concentrated his concerns on noise from neighbours. There is no doubt that noise from neighbours generates most complaints and that it is, in some ways, the most intractable topic because individual freedoms as well as nuisance are involved. Seeking to strike the right balance between individual freedoms is never easy.

It must be sensible for neighbours to try to sort out problems among themselves before invoking the local authority and the law. With that in mind, I am delighted that our first pilot neighbourhood noise awareness scheme has recently been launched in the Forest Hill area of Lewisham. The straightforward idea of the scheme is simply that a local group of residents come together in an area of about 1,100 dwellings, mixed in both form and tenure—some privately owned, some council owned, some detached houses and some blocks of flats. A leaflet has been prepared by and for the residents suggesting ways in which the impact of noisy activities can be restricted. In preparing the leaflet, the residents have sought collectively

to determine, for example, when it is sensible for people to carry out DIY work or when it is sensible for them not to carry out DIY work.

Anyone who is suffering and who cannot secure an improvement by a direct approach can drop a note into the local authority neighbourhood office and the complaint will be followed up. The Department of the Environment has funded the development work on the project. We will watch its progress closely and we shall be interested to see how it develops. We hope that if the initiative in Lewisham proves to be a success, it can be replicated elsewhere, including, perhaps, my hon. Friend's constituency.

In view of the misleading impression that may have been given in some articles in the press about the neighbourhood noise awareness scheme, I stress that in all such schemes the initiative must lie with residents. The leaflet will say whatever they want it to say. There is no national model telling people what to do—nor is there necessarily a desire to prevent individuals from engaging in particular activities. The objective is to make people think about the disturbance that they may cause and about the times of day at which their neighbours may find that least irritating. Where disputes arise, the scheme will enable communities to settle them without recourse to court action, although the power for an individual to go to court as a last resort remains unchanged.

My hon. Friend referred to the difficulties caused by noisy private parties, such as blues parties, which go on not just for hours but sometimes for days, and at a volume that pollutes the local environment. He expressed concern about ghetto-blasters and car radios played loudly either unthinkingly or, even worse, deliberately. We have given a good deal of thought to complaints about noisy private parties. As my hon. Friend emphasised, those who complain about noisy parties are frequently frustrated that they are powerless to act. It is understandable, therefore, that they should become even more frustrated and furious when they find that a local authority officer or police officer arriving at the scene of a party is apparently also powerless to act to stop it in its tracks.

The officers face several obstacles. Making a noise is not in itself a criminal offence. The name of the organiser cannot be ascertained. The noise-maker cannot be arrested. Moreover, I suspect that there are problems of natural justice in making the owners of premises responsible even if they are not there when the party is held. We are looking at ways in which to make progress on that. It may be possible for council officials temporarily to remove equipment such as loudspeakers, with police support where appropriate. I am also considering the provision in Scotland, where it is an offence not to desist from making a noise when requested by the police to do so.

My hon. Friend specifically referred to blues parties. In addition to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, we must bear in mind the fact that blues parties that party-goers pay to attend may qualify as private entertainments and may need to be licensed. If a council can establish that a party is being held for private gain and if that party is not licensed, penalties may be imposed. A fine of up to £20,000 or imprisonment for up to six months or both may be applied in respect of parties for which no licence is held, or if a licence exists but its conditions have been breached. Those powers constitute a significant deterrent to the people who organise blues parties with the intention of making a profit.

The noise review working party was also concerned with the control of noise from commerce and industry in mixed residential areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) reminded us that these issues are not always easy to resolve. In many towns there are no neat distinct residential and commercial areas. Some people might want to build new homes. However, local authorities can take action in respect of self-build if they believe that a nuisance is being caused to others.

We are concerned that the present arrangements for mixed residential areas are not completely satisfactory. We shall be writing to the British Standards Institution about the recent revision of the relevant British standard. We are also considering the regulations on noise abatement zones. Modern technology should allow us to make the regulations simpler and more useful. We intend to underpin the work on tackling the nuisance of noise with appropriate research.

The Department of the Environment spends about £750,000 a year on research and the priorities have recently been re-ordered in line with the priorities identified by the working party. I hope that the House will see——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Leonard Pell

2.30 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the case of my constituent, Mr. Leonard Pell, who lives in Carlton, near Barnsley. The case is rather complex, as I will explain.

Mr. Pell is a war pensioner and I hope that this short debate will highlight the erosion of the various benefits that have been paid to war pensioners over the past few years. In particular, I shall refer to the difference in pensions paid to service personnel who retired from the services before 1973 and the benefits paid to those who retired after that date. The difference is due to improvements to the scheme initiated between 1971 and 1973. I shall also refer to the level of disregard applying to war pensions. Although the Minister who is to reply will concentrate on the armed forces pensions scheme, I shall refer to the level of disregard operated by local authorities when taking account of benefits for the purpose of community charge benefit.

As I said, Mr. Pell's case is rather complex. It encompasses several different issues and benefits. He qualifies for several different benefits because of his substantial disability. Perhaps I should explain Mr. Pell's present circumstances.

Mr. Pell served in the RAF until he was invalided from the service with a 70 per cent. disability assessment. No doubt the Minister will agree that a 70 per cent. disability assessment is substantial. Since then, Mr. Pell has had surgery and is unfortunately diagnosed as suffering from chronic atrophic gastritis which might lead to cancer in later years. Mr. Pell has also suffered a mild heart attack and is therefore considerably disabled. His disabilities are compounded somewhat by his wife's disabilities. Unfortunately, she is diabetic and was recently discharged from hospital after an operation to remove a tumour. It is clear that Mr. and Mrs. Pell are experiencing considerable financial strain as a result of their joint disabilities. Their financial needs include a special diet for Mrs. Pell because she is diabetic, and the provision of extra clothing and the cost of extra heating which they both require. Mr. Pell's major complaint is that the level of war pensions over the past few years has deteriorated in relation to other benefits and in relation to the 1973 improvements.

It has long been accepted by Governments that pensions in respect of injuries inflicted during war time or during periods of service in Her Majesty's forces—and for that matter injuries at work—are paid at a slightly higher level than pensions for ordinary social security beneficiaries. That is based on the idea that people injured during their service in the forces were serving the country or the economy in war time. That principle has been eroded by the Government, who no longer maintain that that distinction is entirely valid. Over the past few years, Social Security Bills have tended to remove the distinction between war pensioners and industrial injuries pensioners over and above normal social security pensions. Changes to the social security benefits which came about as part of the 1986 review have also eroded the comparable value of war pensions in relation to other benefits.

Mr. Pell pointed out in his letter, a copy of which was forwarded to the Minister, that with the introduction of benefits such as income support, war pensioners do not qualify for or are not entitled to some of the benefits for which income support beneficiaries qualify. It is interesting that, for service personnel injured during peace time or at a time other than in war, there are no support funds such as the Gulf support fund or the South Atlantic fund. My constituent does not qualify for any of the charitable benefits that have been made available following recent conflicts.

In 1973, the armed forces pension scheme introduced service-attributable benefits. Since 1973, pensions for service personnel have been drastically improved. However, no retrospection was allowed to service personnel who qualified for pensions before 31 March 1973.

In his letter to me, the Minister was good enough to outline arguments about retrospection. The cost of retrospection is quite substantial in relation to all service personnel. It has long been a condition that a person can benefit from a pension scheme only if he is a current serving member. I appreciate the Government's arguments, but the House has also recognised those arguments in the case of women who were widowed and qualified for armed forces pensions before 1973. As we know, action was taken for that special group.

Special consideration should be given to Mr. Pell and others who were invalided and severely injured during their service for the country. Mr. Pell's disablement is so severe that his working ability has been restricted. Over the past few years it has been totally restricted—he has been unable to work at all. As he could not continue in the service until his scheduled discharge date, he does not qualify for a full pension, but he would have done had he not been injured. As Mr. Pell pointed out in his correspondence, had he not been so severely injured but allowed to continue his service until his discharge date, he would have been well looked after with pensions and benefits.

Mr. Pell's disability was so great that, initially, he could take up only light work, which he had to give up. He has been unable to build up an occupational pension to add to the pension benefits that he receives from the forces. He was forced to give up employment during the early 1980s and he has been unable to build up any occupational pension provision to compensate him for his inability to work.

If Mr. Pell had been able to continue in the service despite his disability, he could have built up an occupational pension provision and his entitlement to pension. He argues that the Government should seriously consider improvements in the benefits given to service men who left the services before 1973 and were so seriously disabled that they could not work outside the services. These are men who were invalided from the service. I support Mr. Pell's argument that they should be looked on as a distinct and deserving group.

Any retrospective action taken by the Government would have to exclude service men who retired from the services before 1973 but were able to complete their term of service, or those who were disabled or qualified for incapacity pensions but were able to work outside the services in civvy street and continue their service term until they reached their retirement date.

Mr. Pell's other complaint is about the war disability pension, which is regarded by the Department of Social Security as a maintenance benefit. It is subject to the statutory disregard of £10 for the community charge

benefit. But the DSS regards such pensions as having "a special nature" because they are awarded in respect of service in the armed forces.

The £10 disregard is now too low as a proportion of the war pension, the maximum level of which is about £76. In 1971 the maximum pension was about £7·50 and the disregard was about £4, so the disregard was about 53 per cent. The level of disregard has fallen in real terms during the past 20 years. The disregard should be increased to take account of that.

Several other issues which affect war pensioners are not the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, but I shall touch on them in my concluding remarks. They include the community charge and the disability rate allowance for adaptations and special fitments. Many war pensioners qualified for rent rebates for alterations to their properties. When the community charge was introduced, that rebate was removed, so again war pensioners suffered a fall in income.

My constituent is considerably disabled as a result of his service to the country. His earning capacity was severely eroded and now he believes that his pension entitlement is also being severely eroded. I call on the Government to consider carefully the small group of war pensioners who were so severely disabled as a result of their service that they could no longer work. The Government should perhaps look on them in the same way as they considered the pre-1973 war widows.

2.43 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on securing this Adjournment debate. I confirm that the disregard for the community charge is not one of my responsibilities. However, I shall show the essence of the hon. Gentleman's remarks to my hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment and I am sure that they will communicate with him on the matter. I am responsible for the armed forces pension scheme. We all want those who have served in the armed forces, and have experienced some disability as a result of that service, to be appropriately provided for. I am sure that we all recognise the value of the service that they have given to their country. I will address the points which the hon. Member raised in a moment, but first I should like to set out the background against which those points must be considered.

In dealing with service pensions we should recognise that there are two separate sets of provision under which benefits may be paid to ex-service men and their dependants. There is the war pension scheme, which is administered by the Department of Social Security and provides benefits specifically in those cases where a member of the armed forces is injured or dies as a result of his service. There is also the armed forces' own pension scheme, which is administered by the Ministry of Defence. It is mainly the provisions of that scheme which provide the basis for this debate.

The armed forces pension scheme is an occupational pension scheme and is broadly similar in nature to other public service pension schemes, although there are a number of features designed to reflect the somewhat different characteristics of service in the armed forces compared with the majority of other types of employment, and the relatively short careers which apply to many service men. There is also special provision for the greater physical risks which may arise whether through war-like operations, training for such operations or, indeed, many other types of duty that service personnel may be called upon to perform. Those risks are catered for today by a combination of appropriate provisions within the occupational scheme, in addition to the important and longstanding provisions of the war pensions scheme.

As with any other provision, money has to be found to pay for the benefits. In the case of the armed forces pension scheme, there is no standing fund from which these costs are met. There are no direct contributions and benefits are paid for, as they arise, from money allocated to the defence vote each year. Service personnel are not, of course, completely insulated from the cost of providing for their pensions. The review body on armed forces pay, in establishing pay rates to recommend to the Government, takes into account the greater value of armed forces pension scheme benefits over those of comparator pension schemes. A reduction is then made from comparator rates of pay to reflect this, and for the overwhelming majority that reduction currently stands at 9 per cent. While this provides an invisible offset, the cost of pensions and any increase in commitments associated with them have to be met within the overall allocation for defence each year. Those costs are continually rising, not least because benefits have been improved from time to time, and the estimated figure for 1990-91 was £1,408 million. They represent an increasing proportion of total defence expenditure, and will of course remain a commitment for many years to come.

As an occupational pension scheme, the armed forces scheme is managed in accordance with the same principles which apply to such schemes in general. There are two important and allied points. First, entitlements under the scheme are, for any individual and through him his dependants, derived from the rules of the scheme which were in force at the date of his retirement. Secondly, when rules are changed, those changes do not apply to those who are no longer serving at the time when they are brought into effect.

The detailed rules are inevitably complex, but the main features of the scheme as it stands today are as follows: a pension, paid immediately on retirement, for officers who have given 16 years or more of reckonable service and for other ranks who have given 22 years or more reckonable service; deferred pensions, payable from the age 60, for those who serve for shorter periods, subject to a minimum of two years; pensions for widows, widowers, and dependent children; immediate pensions for those invalided from service on account of injury or ill-health, subject to a minimum of two years' service; enhanced benefits where that injury or ill-health is attributed to service in the forces, with no minimum qualifying period of service; enhanced benefits for the widows and dependent children of those whose death is attributed to service.

All those pensions are index linked. In the case of long-service pensions, the cumulative increases are payable from the age of 55. But for invaliding awards, and widows', widowers' and dependants' pensions, the index-linking comes into effect immediately following the award. Long-service and invalidity pensions are calculated from representative rates of pay for each rank, and on length of service given. For a full career, based on retirement at age 55, the pension is equivalent to about half of the corresponding rate of pay with, in addition, a

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

tax-free lump sum of three times the annual rate of pension awarded. Because many service men have to retire early, the rate of pension paid for shorter periods of service is enhanced to be better than strictly proportional to the service given. This is to compensate for the short career which may be all that is available, and, as I said, service men can therefore retire on pension by about the age of 40.

I have already referred to lump sums paid on retirement at the end of a full career, and lump sums are also paid on a similar basis where pensions are awarded for shorter periods of service, and where invaliding occurs. Additional lump sums are paid where injury or death is attributable to service.

I have given an outline of the main benefits which are available today. However, as with other pension schemes, there have been developments over the years which have gradually introduced changes and improvements in what is provided. I fully recognise that the benefit provisions have reached their current excellent level over a considerable period. In many cases, changes have been made in step with general developments in occupational pension provisions in this country. Others have been particularly devised for members of the armed forces.

Overall, the changes have included the introduction in 1960 of scales for officers linked to length of service, instead of standard rates for service of at least a minimum length; a substantial revision in 1972 following the introduction of the military salary, incorporating a direct link with representative rates of pay; in 1973, an improvement in the benefits available on invaliding, including where that was attributable to service, and for widows; the introduction in 1975 of deferred pensions for short periods of service; the introduction of pensions for widows of post-retirement marriages in 1978; and, four years ago, the introduction of pensions for the widowers of female personnel, thus ensuring equal treatment between the sexes.

It is against that background of progressive improvement, and the additional costs associated with each new development, that I shall address the points raised by the debate. I understand, and sympathise with, the feelings of those who have retired in earlier years and do not receive benefits at the same level as are available to those who have retired more recently. The fact that there are such differences is not unique to the armed forces scheme and the hon. Gentleman acknowledged that. It could be found in the great majority of schemes, and for similar reasons. As I mentioned earlier, improvements must be paid for. If we had applied every improvement retrospectively, the costs involved would have been significantly greater and it is unlikely that we would have been able to reach the standard which exists today.

The scheme as it now stands is very good. I am afraid that we cannot turn back the clock and confer additional entitlements on those who are ineligible because of their earlier dates of discharge. The position for the Department of Social Security's war pensions scheme is, however, somewhat different. Pensions and other benefits payable under that scheme are at standard rates which apply to all those who are eligible, regardless of when they served in the armed forces or the particular date on which that service came to an end.

I acknowledge the valuable part which is played by the many organisations particularly associated with serving or ex-service personnel in providing help and care for those who have need of them. Such needs are not necessarily financial. They can take many forms. Recently, with the conflict in the Gulf, we have seen how ready such organisations are to help in any way possible. Happily, with the swift and successful conclusion of the Gulf operations, little was needed. But I, and hon. Members present today, will wish to pay tribute to those dedicated people, many of whom are themselves ex-service men and some with their own war disabilities, who do so much which is out of the public eye.

I come to the case of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, Mr. Leonard Pell. Mr. Pell's service with the Royal Air Force occurred in a number of stages. He initially joined in May 1943 for air crew training but was released in June 1944. After the war, in 1947, he enlisted on an eight-year engagement, which he completed normally and was released in August 1955. In 1959 he again re-enlisted, this time for a 12-year engagement with the Royal Air Force Regiment, which was subsequently extended, on the basis of his continuing in service until age 55. But, as the hon. Gentleman explained, Mr. Pell was invalided from service in 1967, having fallen below the required medical standard for his branch.

As a result, under the provisions which were in force at that time, he was awarded an invaliding pension under the armed forces pension scheme, and a lump sum. His case was also referred to the Department of Social Security for consideration under the provisions of the war pensions scheme. The claim was accepted and, since Mr. Pell's level of disability was at that stage assessed as being in the range of 6 to 14 per cent., he was paid the appropriate lump sum under that scheme. The hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Pell was assessed at 70 per cent., but that was a later development. The initial assessment was between 6 and 14 per cent. His pension from the Royal Air Force also became tax free.

As the House may know, war pensioners may seek reassessment if their disability appears to increase or if new disabilities emerge. This is what has happened in Mr. Pell's case. His position has been subject to review, with the result that his overall level of disability is now assessed at 70 per cent., covering a number of different conditions. He has also become eligible for a number of allowances under the scheme which, with his basic war disability pension, are today worth just under £200 per week.

I have here the figures showing how this is made up. There is a 70 per cent. war disability pension, unemployability supplement, comforts allowance, invalidity allowance, wife allowance, dependants allowance, age allowance and mobility supplement. Together, they make up a figure of £198·94 per week. That is non-taxable and is in addition to his tax-free pension from the Royal Air Force which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is just under £30 per week. Mr. Pell therefore receives, tax free, about £230 per week. As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the war pension provisions are substantially better than those that would be available under the industrial injuries scheme, had corresponding disabilities occurred as a result of civilian employment.

The hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Pell had no occupational pension, but he was working from 1967, although he may have found it more difficult to work recently, and that would have given him the opportunity to

contribute to an occupational scheme or to fund one through the work that he was doing. I accept that Mr. Pell's armed forces pension would have been larger if the improvements made to the scheme in 1972 and 1973 had been in force in 1967. His pension would also have been larger today had he not elected, as he was perfectly entitled to do, to commute part of his initial award shortly after his discharge in order to raise additional capital. As I have explained, there are cogent reasons why we feel unable to make the scheme improvements retrospective, but I hope that the House will agree that the provisions which are available, taken together, represent a very reasonable recognition of Mr. Pell's needs.

The hon. Member referred to the debate in which I was involved on war widows, and we have seen his early-day motion, which is on the Order Paper today, suggesting that we should make special provision for war disability pensioners whose service ended before March 1963 in some similar way to what has been done for war widows whose husbands' service ended before that date. As the House will recall, it was announced on 11 December 1989 that special payments would be introduced for war widows whose husbands had been killed, or whose service had ended, before March 1973. However, the House will also recall that those special payments were introduced in recognition of the view, held widely in this House and the country as a whole at the time, that the pre-1973 war widows are a unique category for whom quite exceptional measures were appropriate. That was a view also accepted by the organisations representing ex-service men, including those with war disabilities.

There may also be those who recall that I acknowledged in the House on 23 November 1989 that there was nevertheless some correlation between the position of war widows and those with war disabilities, depending upon service ending before or after March 1973. The connection is, of course, that for both widows and the disabled benefits available from the Ministry of Defence are influenced by the improvements made to the armed forces occupational scheme in 1973. As I have said previously, this date has no significance whatsoever for the standard benefits paid under the separate war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security. The benefits payable under the revised occupational scheme are better than those available previously. However, the similarity in origin does not mean that the situation is, in all respects, the same.

Question put and agreed to.

It being Three o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House, without Question put, pursuant to the Resolutions [13 May], till Monday 3 June.*

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 May 1991

TRANSPORT

Wheel-clamping

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to make it illegal to wheel-clamp orange badge holders on private car parks or other private land.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on 25 April at column *524*.

Brighton Line

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is to attend the forthcoming British Rail celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Brighton line.

Mr. Freeman: I hope to be present for the ceremony for the reintroduction of the Brighton Belle on 21 September.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the scheme for the high-speed rail link submitted to him by British Rail and the alternative proposals.

Mr. Freeman: I expect British Rail's report on the route options to be published in due course when we have had time to consider it.

ENVIRONMENT

Recycling

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Welsh local authorities and voluntary bodies are eligible to bid for money from the £40 million kitty established in his Department's recycling encouragement initiative.

Mr. Baldry: No. £40 million of supplementary credit approvals are being made available over three years for local authorities in England.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby, Barrow in Furness, Wandsworth, Westminster and Elmbridge particulars of the amount spent and income received per adult under each category in table 4 of "Local Government Financial Statistics No. 2 1990".

Mr. Key: I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to abolish the £15 million budget exemption rule for the purposes of charge-capping designation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Ministers have indicated that this is an issue to be considered.

Parrots

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many licences for the importation of (i) green-cheeked Amazon parrots and (ii) grey parrots were issued in each year since 1988;

(2) what advice he has received from the United Kingdom Scientific Authority on the convention on international trade in endangered species concerning the importation of (i) green-cheeked Amazon parrots and (ii) grey parrots.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

	Licences issued		
	1988	*1989*	*1990*
Green cheeked Amazons (Amazona viridigenalis)	3	1	—
Grey Parrots (Psittacus erithacus)	151	148	94

All applications to import these species are referred to our scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, for advice on whether such imports would be harmful to efforts to conserve the species.

Urban Development

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the land area of England is *(a)* now urbanised or built upon and *(b)* likely to be urbanised or built upon by the end of the century based on existing plans.

Mr. Yeo: Recently published research by my Department on rates of urbanisation in England 1981-2001 showed that in 1981, 10·2 per cent. of the land area of England was urbanised and forecast that by 2001 the extent of urbanisation would be 11 per cent., an increase of 7·9 per cent. over a 20-year period. This estimate was based on the likely land requirements to house the projected increase in households, rather than the proposals in structure plans.

Cleaning Agents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a summary of the main findings of the departmental report on pollutants in cleaning agents.

Mr. Baldry: A summary of the main findings of the departmental report on pollutants in cleaning agents has been published along with the report. Copies have been placed in the Library and have been sent to interested parties.

EC Structural Funds

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department is to propose any changes to the rules governing access by local authorities to the European regional development fund and other EC structural funds.

Mr. Yeo: Access by local authorities to the European structural funds, including the European regional development fund—ERDF—is governed by the relevant European Community regulations which establish operating procedures for the structural funds. In consultation with member states, the Commission will be reviewing the structural funds so that new regulations can be in place by the end of 1993. In the meantime, no change is envisaged to the current arrangements whereby local authorities apply for ERDF grants.

Water Shortages

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken of the shortage of water in the south-east of England in the planning department and inspectorate of his Department.

Mr. Yeo: Water shortage can be a material planning consideration to be taken into account by my right hon. Friend and his inspectors when taking planning decisions. When local planning authorities prepare their development plans, they commonly consult the National Rivers Authority about the water resource implications. Such plans may include policies that planning permission will normally only be granted for development when appropriate infrastructure, including the provision of water, is available.

Water storage can be one of the technical matters to be considered when my right hon. Friend or his inspectors determine applications for orders or appeals under the Water Acts. In such cases, and particularly when surface supplies are in jeopardy, the stored quantity of water is considered against the demands upon it.

Affordable Housing

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the role of the planning system in facilitating the provision of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: We are today publishing guidance in a circular, describing the role the planning system can play in securing the provision of affordable housing, and announcing more flexible arrangements to encourage shared ownership schemes in rural areas.

The planning system must play an important role in securing adequate provision of affordable housing. Development plans should make realistic assessments of total housing requirements, including the provision needed for affordable housing. While not imposing fixed quotas, plan policies can reasonably encourage developers to incorporate affordable housing in larger developments. In rural areas, we have encouraged authorities to develop policies for the release of small, "off-plan" sites for affordable housing.

In development control, conditions and agreements can be used to promote affordable housing schemes, where control is exercised in pursuance of a proper planning objective, and is sound and enforceable. Such schemes may be promoted in partnership with private developers, but, generally, the most secure and effective way of securing the provision of affordable housing is by co-operation with a housing association or other body, such as a village trust, whose continuing interest in the property, through either renting or shared ownership, can provide a basis for control over subsequent changes of ownership or occupation.

We have decided to make a change in the present arrangements for shared ownership. Until now, we have not allowed public subsidy to be invested in schemes unless the occupiers have a right to "staircase" to full owner-occupation if they wish, at a time of their choosing, without being forced to move.

To encourage more schemes in the future, we have decided to amend our policy, and also allow public subsidy to be put into housing association and other private shared ownership schemes which contain a reasonable staircasing restriction in the special circumstances of a rural settlement. Details of those circumstances are set out in the circular published today.

This is an important measure of flexibility which I know will be welcomed by many organisations who wish to see more done to bring home ownership within the reach of existing villagers. We have listened to their advice and we have acted. I now look to local authorities, to landowners and developers, and to housing associations to respond.

Overseas Disasters

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange to repeal the legislation which prohibits local authorities from contributing directly to appeal funds to relieve overseas disasters.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* Local authorities have only the powers that have been given to them by, or under, an Act of Parliament. Parliament has never given to them a power to contribute directly to an appeal fund which is solely for the relief of disasters outside the United Kingdom. There is, therefore, no legislative prohibition to repeal.

Monitoring Nitrogen and Sulphur Dioxide

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to increase the number of *(a)* nitrogen monitoring stations and *(b)* sulphur dioxide monitoring stations operating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: The Government are taking forward plans, announced in the environment White Paper, for a major expansion of the United Kingdom monitoring networks. Proposals for a new £3 million enhanced urban monitoring programme are currently out to tender. These proposals aim to increase the number of automatic sites measuring nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide from 15 at present to 27 over the next three years. The first phase of the programme will locate new sites in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, Newcastle and Birmingham and is expected to be complete early next year.

Environment Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the second preparatory committee meeting of the United Nations conference on environment and development.

Mr. Trippier: The second meeting of the preparatory committee for the United Nations conference on environment and development—UNCED—took place in Geneva from 18 March to 5 April 1991. The preparatory committee examined a series of reports on environment and development topics and instructed the conference secretariat to prepare further reports, focusing on potential areas for action by Governments and international organisations, in time for the third meeting of the preparatory committee in Geneva from 12 August to 4 September 1991.

The preparatory committee made progress in a number of areas, including agreement on the participation of non-governmental organisations in the preparatory meetings and on the examination of options for a global consensus on forests by the committee at its third meeting. This decision could lead to a statement of guiding principles on the management of the world's forests for endorsement by world leaders at UNCED. Working group III of the preparatory committee was established and began its examination of legal, institutional and related matters. The preparatory committee had an initial discussion of the secretary-general's proposals for a programme of work for the international community in the period following the 1992 United Nations conference.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance has been made available to non-governmental organisations to participate in the preparatory meetings for the 1992 United Nations conference on environment and development.

Mr. Trippier: My Department is providing financial assistance for the programme of non-governmental preparations for UNCED which is being organised by the International Institute for Environment and Development on behalf of the United Kingdom committee for the United Nations Environment Programme—UNEP-UK. The United Kingdom delegation to the first two meetings of the preparatory committee for UNCED included a non-governmental adviser from UNEP-UK.

Chernobyl

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received on the effects of radioactive contamination from Chernobyl upon soil bacteria *(a)* in the immediate exclusion zone around Chernobyl and *(b)* elsewhere; and whether his Department has made any scientific study of the effects of radioactive materials on soil bacteria.

Mr. Trippier: A study of the interactions between soil components and radionuclides forms part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food research programme. My Department has not commissioned any research of this nature.

Heather Moorland

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the proportion of heather moorland which has been lost in the last 30 years.

Mr. Trippier: My Department's estimate of heather cover in England and Wales indicates that between 1947 and 1980 heather cover decreased by 20 per cent. We shall have information on losses over the past decade when the results of the "Countryside Survey 1990" have been analysed.

Poll Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had on the question of the immediate abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution rule under poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have received a number of representations. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 8 May, *Official Report*, column 706.

Land Decontamination

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to assess the cost of decontaminating land in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: No. It is not possible to make a realistic estimate of the costs nationwide. However, the Government have introduced legislation—section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990—to require local authorities to set up registers of land that has been subject to contaminative use, and I am pleased to be able to inform the House that a consultation paper with our proposals for registers has just been published. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

When registers are established, we shall know for the first time how much land may be contaminated. Any assessment of the need for decontamination, the methods to be used and their cost would, however, have to be carried out individually for each site as the need arises. The Government are also carrying out research on these issues and we shall publish guidance on them when the results are to hand.

Global Biodiversity Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will make available resources to enable non-governmental organisations to attend the next meeting of the negotiating forum on a global biodiversity convention planned for 24 June to 3 July in Madrid.

Mr. Trippier: The purpose of the Madrid meeting is for Governments to negotiate a framework convention on the conservation of biological diversity. The Department has made no financial provision to enable non-governmental organisations to attend as observers and no request for resources has been made. The Department has made arrangements for regular consultations on the progress and content of the negotiations with the most qualified individuals and organisations from the non-governmental community.

Rhino Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to tighten international and national legislation relating to the trade in rhino products.

Mr. Trippier: All five species of rhinoceros are listed on appendix I of the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora—CITES. This means that almost all trade in rhino products is prohibited already under legislation implementing CITES—EC regulation 3626/82 in the European Community.

Elephants, South Africa

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to oppose any moves by the South African authorities to transfer their elephant population to appendix II of CITES; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The final decision on the application from South Africa for the downlisting of its elephant population will be a matter for the conference of the parties to CITES. We should need to establish in consultation with our EC partners a common Community position. I can confirm that the United Kingdom would not support any proposals to permit trade to recommence unless we were fully satisfied that the conditions for a resumption of trade, drawn up at the seventh CITES conference, had been met.

Live Animals (Transport)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of transit-shed operators at Heathrow airport which operate road vehicles which conform with International Air Transport Association regulations regarding the movement of live animals and birds.

Mr. Trippier: The IATA live animals regulations do not cover ground transport. It is the responsibility of the shipper to ensure that live animals are packed in accordance with the regulations, and the responsibility of the carrier to ensure that live animal shipments are properly handled and loaded.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on which airlines landed consignments of live birds into the United Kingdom in 1990.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby the number of householders qualifying for (i) rate relief, (ii) housing benefit, (iii) the average amount per head in each case and (iv) his forecast under the council tax.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The latest information is as follows:

(i) 11,822 as at February 1990.

(ii) 8,000 as at February 1991.

It is not possible to provide figures showing the average amounts payable in these cases or to provide forecasts for the council tax.

Exotic Animals

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what records his Department keeps of *(a)* the importers and *(b)* the retailers dealing in exotic animals as domestic pets.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* My Department maintains a record of all applications to import species controlled under the provisions of the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 and EC regulation 3626/82, which implements the convention on international trade in endangered species—CITES—in the European Community. We do not, however, maintain a register of retailers as such.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many flying foxes, of what species, have been imported into the United Kingdom in the past five years; and whether he will list the most regular exporting countries.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* Since 1 January 1986, a total of 160 specimens of the Indian flying fox—Pteropus giganteus—have been imported, from Indonesia. Licences have also been issued for the import of 44 specimens of the Rodriguez flying fox—Pteropus rodricensis—from Mauritius and 20 specimens of the Malayan flying fox—Pteropus vampyrus—from Thailand.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hospices (Direct Mailing)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed EC restrictions on direct mailing and his assessment of its effect on hospices with charity status.

Mrs. Rumbold: Proposed requirements in the draft EC data protection directive for consent by data subjects seem likely seriously to inhibit targeted direct mailing by various organisations, including those with charitable status. The Government are taking up this point in the negotiations in Brussels.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Metropolitan police are taking to improve safety in domestic violence units and in the handling of cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the commissioner that, in the light of the tragic incident which recently occurred in the domestic violence unit at Stoke Newington police station, he has appointed a senior officer to consider the implications for practice within the Metropolitan police.

Lewes Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *298*, if he will state the reasons why Lewes prison was put on maximum security alert on *(a)* 22 November 1990 and *(b)* 2 to 6 December 1990; and what were the results obtained.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 22 November 1990, a full alert was called at Lewes prison in response to information about a planned mass escape involving a firearm. Nothing was found during searches.

Following the discovery of a replica firearm on 2 December, a further full alert was initiated from 2 to 6 December 1990. In the course of extensive searches of all parts of the prison, a number of rounds of blank ammunition were found.

Prisons

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places, not including accommodation temporarily taken out of use for refurbishment, are currently provided in prisons; and what is the total prison population at the latest convenient date.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 9 May the total certified normal accommodation of prison service establishments was 44,336 places. This figure excluded places taken out of use for major refurbishment, but included places taken temporarily out of use for repairs or minor refurbishment —for example, for the installation of integral sanitation systems. On the same day, the prison population, including prisoners held in police cells, was 45,262.

Breath-Testing Devices

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue a direction under section 9 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 to the Independent Television Commission on the advertising of breath-testing devices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The advertising of breath-testing devices is prohibited under the ITC's code of advertising standards and practice. The ITC has not proposed any change and we have no plans to issue a direction.

Drug Abuse

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his response to the report by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs entitled "Problem Drugs Use: A Review of Training".

Mr. John Patten: The Government welcome this report and are grateful to the advisory council for the time it has devoted to this important subject. I have today written to the chairman, Professor Grahame-Smith, to convey the Government's response to the council's recommendations. A copy of my letter has been placed in the Library.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service College

40. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will encourage the Civil Service college to attract private sector students and strengthen links between Government and industry.

Mr. Renton: Yes. I have set the college a strategic target to increase the number of private sector students by nearly 300 per cent. between now and 1995.

"Next Steps" Initiative

41. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps he is taking to improve and extend the training available to civil servants to enable them to take advantage of the "next steps" initiative.

Mr. Renton: In line with the principles of "next steps", it is for Departments and agencies, in the light of their business objectives, to ensure that their staff are properly trained and developed for the job. My own Department supports them in this, particularly through the Civil Service college.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he has any plans to encourage contracting out as part of the "next steps" programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Agencies are intended to deliver better quality public services within available resources. One important way of doing this, in accordance with Government policy, is by testing wherever possible the costs of having work done by the private sector compared with in-house costs, and selecting the option which gives best value for money. As with the question of privatisation, the scope for contracting out the whole of the activity is addressed before each agency is set up and will be kept under review subsequently.

THE ARTS

Libraries

32. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what proposals he has to safeguard the level and quality of book stocks in libraries in the West Midlands region.

Mr. Renton: The day-to-day running of public libraries including the provision of book stocks is a matter for local library authorities in the light of local needs and priorities.

I investigate any complaints which I receive about the levels of services provided.

Turner Paintings (Government Offices)

33. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many Turner paintings are currently hanging in Government offices.

Mr. Renton: There are currently four paintings by Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) hanging in Government offices. They are:

A Quiet Ruin
Italian Landscape with Tower
Waves Breaking against the Wind
Sunset

These four paintings are on temporary loan from the Tate gallery, London, to the Prime Minister's office, 10 Downing street, 1991. The loan was negotiated in 1989.

Black Arts Organisations

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many black arts organisations based in London he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. Renton: I have visited two black arts organisations based in London since my appointment, the Black Theatre Co-operative in March and the Temba theatre company in April.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Secondary School Teachers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received a copy of the interim report produced by the university of Warwick on the workloads of secondary school teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is grateful to the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association for sending him a copy of this interim report. He has made it clear that he holds the commitment and professionalism of teachers in high regard and he has already taken steps to minimise the burdens which the implementation of our education reforms has placed upon them. This includes stemming the flow of paperwork to schools.

Citizenship Studies

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the study of citizenship in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The National Curriculum Council issued advice to schools, "Curriculum Guidance 8: Education for Citizenship", last November. The document offers guidance to schools on planning and implementing a programme of education for citizenship and illustrates how the topic can be integrated with other elements of the curriculum. It is for individual schools, in the light of this guidance, to determine their own approaches to the teaching of citizenship.

Halifax Schools

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the capital allocation for buildings for North Halifax high and Crossley Heath schools, Halifax.

Mr. Eggar: Both these schools will receive grant calculated for capital expenditure by reference to the number of pupils on roll. For 1991-92 the allocation for North Halifax high school is £25,100 and for Crossley Heath school is £25,300. Both schools have also bid for support for specified capital projects. Those bids are being considered.

Grove Road Schools, Tring

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will indicate the budget which would be available to the governors of Grove Road junior and infants schools, Tring, for the current year on the basis the schools were a joint and grant-maintained school.

Mr. Eggar: Hertfordshire local education authority's financial delegation scheme allocates £212,916 and £161,095 respectively to Grove Road junior and infants schools. Should these schools achieve grant-maintained status they would receive those amounts plus an additional 16 per cent. to help meet costs previously borne by the LEA and a further sum reflecting LEA subsidies for school meals. They would also be eligible for other grants available to grant-maintained schools.

Research and Development

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the figures of public funding for research and development by higher education establishments in the United Kingdom in the years from 1979-80 to 1989-90.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The estimated public funding for scientific research and development in the universities through the University Grants Committee and the Universities Funding Council is as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1979-80	359
1980-81	441
1981-82	484
1982-83	535
1983-84	551
1984-85	564
1985-86	609
1986-87	655
1987-88	695
1988-89	725
1989-90	785

Comparable figures are not available for other higher education institutions.

Doctors (Pay Parity)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what steps he is taking to ensure continuing parity of pay between clinical academic staff and national health service doctors;

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has available sufficient funds to continue parity of pay between clinical academic staff and national health service doctors.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, as the representatives of university employers, to settle the pay levels of clinical and other academic staff within the aggregate resources available. The Government remain committed to the principle that universities will not be given less favourable treatment than the hospital and community health service in any decisions to provide additional funds to meet extra costs arising from the annual recommendations of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body on NHS doctors' pay.

Stratford Grant-Maintained School

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers are currently employed at Stratford grant-maintained school; and what is the proportion of teachers to pupils.

Mr. Eggar: These are matters for the governing body of the school. The information is not held centrally.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the level of annual maintenance grant for Stratford grant-maintained school for 1991-92; and what will be the cost per pupil at *(a)* Stratford grant-maintained school, *(b)* on average for national allocations to grant-maintained schools and *(c)* on average at non grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: The level of annual maintenance grant for Stratford grant-maintained school for 1991-92 has not

been finalised. The proposed figure, issued to the school and to Newham local education authority for comment, is £1,551,435.

The 1991-92 data on average allocations to grant-maintained schools, and collated data on non grant-maintained schools taken from local education authorities' published local management of schools budget statements, are not yet available.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total number of pupils at Stratford grant-maintained school now; and what was the figure before grant-maintained status was achieved.

Mr. Eggar: I understand that as of 10 May 1991 the school had 289 pupils on roll. It achieved grant-maintained status when it was incorporated as grant maintained on 1 April 1991. The last annual pupil number count carried out at the school while it was in local education authority control was for January 1991. The LEA reported that the school at that time had 393 pupils on roll.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the projected roll and spread of A-level courses in the sixth form at Stratford grant-maintained school for the next academic year.

Mr. Eggar: These are matters for the governing body of the school. The information is not held centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the schools which have applied to his Department to transfer to grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: I will list the schools under three categories: (i) those whose applications for GM status we have approved; (ii) those whose applications for GM status we have rejected; (iii) those that have published proposals on which decisions are pending.

(i)

Adams' Grammar School, Newport
Audenshaw High School, Thameside
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School. Rossendale
Bankfield High School, Widnes
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School, Kings Heath
Beaconsfield High School
Beechen Cliff School, Bath
Bingley Grammar School
Bishopshalt School, Hillingdon
Bournemouth Grammar School
Bridgewater Hall School, Milton Keynes
Brindley Hall School, Milton Keynes
Bullers Wood School for Girls, Chislehurst
Burgate School, Fordingbridge
Caistor School
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, Kensington
Carre's Grammar School, Sleaford
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School, Mirfield
Chalvedon School, Basildon
Claremont High School, Kenton
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School
Colyton Grammar School, Colyford
Crossley Heath School, Halifax
Ecclesbourne School, Duffield
Francis Bacon School, St. Albans
Great Barr School
Guildford County School
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys
Hardley Secondary School, Fawley
Heckmondwike Grammar School
Hendon School
King Edward VI Grammar School, Louth
Kingsley Park Middle School, Northampton
Kingswood School, Corby
Kirkbie Kendal School, Kendal
Lancaster Girls Grammar School
Lancaster Royal Grammar School
London Nautical School, Blackfriars
London Oratory School, Hammersmith
Long Field High School, Melton Mowbray
Marling School, Stroud
Moseley Park School, Wolverhampton
Netherthorpe School, Stavely
Newbold Grange High School, Rugby
Nonsuch High School for Girls, Cheam
North Halifax High School, Illingworth
Oldfield School, Bath
Old Swinford Hospital, Stourbridge
Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School, Alford
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys, Barnet
Queensbury School, Dunstable
Reading School
Ribston Hall High School, Gloucester
Rickmansworth School
Sexey's School, Bruton
Skegness Grammar School
Small Heath School
Southfield School for Girls, Kettering
Southlands School, Reading
St. Augustine RC School, Trowbridge
St. Bartholomew's School, Newbury
St. Francis Xavier's College, Woolton
St. George's School, Sleaford
St. James' CE School, Farnworth
Stratford School, Forest Gate
Stroud High School
The Cornwallis School, Linton
The Grammar School for Girls, Wilmington, near Dartford
The Kings School Grantham
The Maplesden Noakes School, Maidstone
Watford Boys Grammar School
Westcliff High School for Boys, Essex[1]
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys, Dartford
Wilsons School, Wallington
Wolverhampton High School for Girls
Woodroffe School, Lyme Regis
Wymondham College, Morley

[1] minded for approval.

(ii)

Blessed Hugh More RC Secondary School, Grantham
Castlemount School, Dover
Southpark High School, Lincolnshire
Ramsden School for Girls, Orpington
Sir James Altham School, Watford
Foster's Grammar School for Boys, Sherborne
Lord Digby's Grammar School for Girls, Sherborne
Hindley Park High School, Wigan
Kettering Boy's School
The Longlands School, Stourbridge
Simon Digby Comprehensive School, Chelmsly Wood
Highwood School, Nailsworth
Walsingham School

(iii)

Appledore C.E. Primary School, Ashford
Arley Primary School, Northwhich
Arnewood School, New Milton
Bourne Primary School
Cliffe Woods Middle School, Rochester
Collingwood School, Camberley
Coopers School, Chislehurst
Copland Community School, Wembley
Dartford Grammar School, West Hill
Drayton Manor High School, Hanwell
Ellerdine Primary School, Shropshire
Foster's Boys Grammar School, Yeovil[1]
Graveney School, Wandsworth
Greenway Comprehensive School, Uxbridge

Harwood School, Fulham
Haydon School, Pinner
Highams Park School, Waltham Forest
Homewood School, Tenterden
Kettleshulme Church of England Primary School, Cheshire
Langley Park Boys School, Bromley
Lord Digby's Girls Grammar School, Sherborne[1]
Manor High School, Wednesbury
Moulton Primary School, Northamptonshire
Newton Church of England School, Lancashire
Northolt High School, Ealing
Parmiters School, Watford
Queen Elizabeth School, Penrith
Queensmead School, South Ruislip
Raines Foundation School, Tower Hamlets
Ravens Wood School, Bromley
Southlands Comprehensive School, New Romney
St. Aidan's School, Carlisle
St. George's Church of England School, Gravesend
St. Helen's Primary School, Bluntisham
St. John the Baptist School, Woking
St. Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Royston
Swanscombe High School, Kent
Thamesview School, Gravesend
The Down Primary School, Bridgnorth
Townmead School, West Drayton
Turnham Junior School, Lewisham
Vyners School, Ickenham
Watford Girls' Grammar School
William Gladstone School, Parkside
Wold Newton Primary School

[1] Second application.

WALES

National Museum of Wales

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on attendance figures at the National Museum of Wales for the last financial year.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on attendance figures at the National Museum of Wales for the last financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A total of 704,035 people visited the National Museum of Wales during the financial year 1990-91 compared with 469,521 during the previous financial year. This represents an increase of almost 50 per cent.

Public Libraries

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the level and quality of book stocks in public libraries in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Both the level and quality of book stocks in public libraries in Wales are matters for local library authorities. Information on the level of book stocks is prepared and published annually by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in its volumes on public library statistics.

Museums (Funding)

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has met the chair of the Welsh Arts Council to discuss funding for museums in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Arts Council has no responsibility for museums in Wales.

Drinking Water

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to establish a programme of evaluation of the numbers of houses in Wales that have drinking water containing lead levels above those permitted by EC standards.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Water companies in Wales are presently carrying out a survey of water supply zones where lead levels exceed, or are at risk of exceeding, the standard of 50 microgrammes per litre set in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989, a standard which is tighter than the EC limit. The survey should be completed by June and the companies will then determine what, if any, remedial measures are required.

Hospital Travel Cost Scheme

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who is responsible for deciding the criteria and the level of annual funding for the hospital travel cost scheme, following designation of its administration as an agency responsibility.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hospital travel costs scheme is operated throughout the United Kingdom in accordance with the criteria which were established centrally by all three health departments. Annual funding for its operation in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Office.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy towards the establishment of NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The development of a contractual framework for the delivery of quality driven patient care will see NHS trusts increasingly evolving as the natural organisational model for hospitals and other units in Wales. However, it will be important that the initiative for deciding whether to seek self-governing status is determined locally taking account of individual circumstances and commitment. This view has been made clear to district health authority chairmen, senior DHA management and to existing units in Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

Labour Party Programme

99. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister whether any civil servants will be involved in carrying out the costing of Labour's programme to which he referred in his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column 624.

The Prime Minister: Guidance on the involvement of civil servants in costing policies of Opposition parties is set out in the fifth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, Session 1989-90, HC 260.

General Pinochet

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister whether any Government Minister or official plans to meet General Pinochet on his forthcoming visit to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Aid Budget

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now set a timetable for the United Kingdom to meet the United Nations aid target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 30 April at column 163.

Red Cross Appeal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister who approved the Government's £10 million contribution to the Red Cross appeal for the Kurds; when such approval was given; from which departmental budget the donation came; what proportion of the Government's donation will be allocated to relieve hardship of Kurds and Shias in Iraq and Iran; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I announced the Government's decision to contribute £10 million to the "Simple Truth" refugee appeal in my reply to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 29 April at column *31*. This addition to the overseas aid programme will provide relief to all Iraqi refugees, not just Kurds.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Staff Passes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the purpose of the question in the House of Commons pass renewal form which requires applicants to give details concerning their parents.

Mr. MacGregor: I will write to the hon. and learned Member.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq (Nuclear Material)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional resources will be made available by Her Majesty's Government to the International Atomic Energy Agency in respect of enforcement of United Nations Security Council resolution 687; what resources have been committed by the United Kingdom to the special committee of the United Nations in support of that resolution; and whether Her Majesty's Government have any reliable evidence available as to the whereabouts of militarily usable nuclear material in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The method of financing the additional work which the IAEA will undertake as a result of United Nations Security Council resolution 687 has yet to be established by the United Nations secretariat. The United Kingdom has an exemplary record in paying its assessed contributions to the United Nations and the IAEA regular budgets and is ready to pay its appropriate share of the costs of this additional work. Iraq has made two declarations to the IAEA on the location of its nuclear weapons usable material. The declarations are deficient in a number of respects, and do not meet the requirements of UNSCR 687. The location of the material is a matter for verification by the IAEA with the assistance and co-operation of the special commission.

Syria

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the level of human rights violations in Syria; how many political prisoners are currently estimated to be held by the Assad regime; of those, how many are alleged to have been tortured; what is the Government's current policy regarding the sales of arms or high technology to Syria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are well aware of the public concern about human rights in Syria and allegations of torture. The resumption of relations enables us to raise these matters with the Syrians. We will play our part in underlining international concern. EC measures continue to apply to the sale of weapons and related items to Syria.

Kuwait

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, on his recent visit, he raised with the Government of Kuwait the Amnesty International report on the torture of Palestinians; what was the response; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 8 May. The Kuwaiti authorities have made it clear that all residents will be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law.

Rhino Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Governments of China, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan about their continuing to allow the trade in rhino horn.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We fully support efforts to stop the trade in rhino horn. We shall therefore raise this issue when appropriate in our contacts with the authorities in the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand. We have no governmental dealings with the authorities in Taiwan.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables, otherwise identical to table 2.5 of Cm. 1520, showing separately (i) the central Government component of general government expenditure by function, (ii) the local authority component of general government expenditure by function and (iii) the public corporation component of general government expenditure by function.

Mr. Mellor: I am arranging for analyses of the central Government and local authority contributions to the data

on general government expenditure by function presented in table 2.5 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm. 1520—to be placed in the Library of the House. Public corporations' expenditure is not part of general government expenditure although grants, subsidies and net lending from central and local government to public corporations are included. These payments are included in the central Government and local authority analyses I have referred to.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, otherwise identical to table 2.6 of Cm. 1520, which shows separately the contributions of central Government, local authorities and public corporations.

Mr. Mellor: I am arranging for analyses of the central Government and local authority contributions to the data on general government expenditure by economic category presented in table 2.6 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm. 1520—to be placed in the Library of the House. Public corporations' expenditure is not included in general government expenditure although grants, subsidies and net lending from central and local government to public corporations are included. These payments are included in the central Government and local authority analyses I have referred to above.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table covering the period 1963-64 to 1993-94, consistent with table 2.1 of Cm 1520, but expressed to the nearest £ million, showing separately for each of the general Government expenditure columns the respective contributions of (i) central Government, (ii) local authorities and (iii) public corporations.

Mr. Mellor: Data are not readily available in the form requested. I am arranging for tables giving the information requested for the central Government and local authorities components of general government expenditure for the years 1963-64 to 1989-90 consistent with the latest estimates of general government expenditure published in the April 1991 edition of "Financial Statistics" No. 348 to be placed in the Library of the House. Corresponding data for later years are not available.

Public corporations' expenditure is not part of general government expenditure although grants, subsidies and net lending from central and local government to public corporations are included. These payments are included in the central Government and local authority analyses I have referred to.

Economy (Data)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the methods of monitoring of the economy; how he proposes to ensure that such changes will reflect objective and reliable data; and how the retail prices index will reflect what ordinary people are paying for more expensive and less expensive goods and services.

Mr. Maples: A comprehensive statement on the current state of official economic statistics was submitted by the Central Statistical Office to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on Wednesday 24 October 1990—see HC 671, Session 1989-90.

The memorandum gave details of an important package of measures to improve the reliability of economic data which the Central Statistical Office is now implementing. This package was announced to the House by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 May 1990, at column *172*. It is directed towards improving the quality of both the gross domestic product and the balance of payments estimates. In this context it has three major objectives.

(i) Reducing revisions to early estimates of both gross domestic product and the overseas current account by extending the range of quarterly sources;
(ii) Improving the accuracy and coherence of the measurement of gross domestic product through strengthening the weaker elements in the estimates;
(iii) Improving the accuracy and coherence of the financial accounts including the overseas or balance of payments accounts.

The range of quarterly information available is being extended in two ways to improve the reliability of the latest estimates. First, gaps in quarterly coverage are being filled by new statutory quarterly inquiries. Secondly, existing voluntary inquiries are being replaced by strengthened statutory inquiries, which have been found to be more effective in providing reliable estimates. Specific measures aimed at improving estimates of gross domestic product include:

(i) New quarterly turnover inquiries for the service sector;
(ii) Statutory inquires replacing voluntary inquiries into stocks and capital expenditure;
(iii) The voluntary Inland Revenue inquiry into company profits being replaced by a statutory CSO inquiry;
(iv) A new quarterly labour force survey together with other measures to improve employment statistics, and
(v) Improvements to construction statistics.

Other measures are aimed at improving balance of payments statistics and the financial accounts. These include:

(i) New annual and quarterly inquiries into overseas trade in services;
(ii) A survey to assess the reliability of overseas trade valuations;
(iii) Voluntary quarterly inquiries into inward and outward direct investment being replaced by statutory inquiries;
(iv) An annual share register survey;
(v) A new annual inquiry into the financial assets and liabilities of large companies;
(vi) A review of the sectoral analysis of banking flows;
(vii) An investigation of the impact on the financial accounts of institutions in the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands, and
(viii) A review of balance of payments statistics to be completed in July of this year.

Some of these measures have already contributed to improvements in the quality of economic statistics and the others will contribute to further and sustained improvements over the next two years. The statistics have also benefited from implementation of the recommendations of the review of economic statistics completed in April 1989. In particular the introduction of the statutory monthly sales inquiries in 1989 has led to more reliable early estimates of manufacturing output. Also the 1989 annual share register survey has provided more accurate estimates of the holdings of shares by the overseas sector leading to a reduction of £13 billion in the cumulated balancing item for the overseas sector.

The Government attach great importance to the need for reliable economic statistics and will consider further measures to maintain and improve the quality of economic data as the need arises.

The retail prices index measures the change from month to month in the prices of the full range of goods and services bought by the majority of consumers in the United Kingdom. It does so on the basis of well over 120,000 prices collected across the country each month and information on buying patterns from a large and continuous survey of family expenditure. A number of improvements have recently been made to the quantity and quality of price data collected.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of freehold properties transferred in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990 were worth (i) under £20,000 and (ii) over £100,000 (1) nationally and (2) by region;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for sales by individuals of single dwellings the number and average value of transactions nationally and regionally in 1989 and 1990 by range of consideration as set out in "Inland Revenue Statistics 1990";

(3) if he will analyse the property transfers reported to the Inland Revenue in 1988, 1989 and 1990 so as to give for each year *(a)* the percentage of properties under £20,000 and their percentage share of the total value of properties, *(b)* the percentage share over £100,000 and their percentage share of values, *(c)* the median value and *(d)* the average values for all properties and for freehold properties.

Mr. Maude: The tables provide the information requested on property transfers. All estimates are derived from a sample of property transactions in England and Wales which are reported to the Inland Revenue and cover all transactions which are classified as residential. The estimates exclude transactions in non-residential properties, but include a number of low-value transactions which cannot be regarded as ordinary house sales at market value: examples are transactions at nominal value to a connected person, disposal of part share of a house as a result of a divorce or separation, transfer of a half share on marriage, purchases of council houses under the right-to-buy scheme, purchases of tenanted property, transactions involving an exchange of property and other miscellaneous transactions in property at residential addresses. Comparable figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are not available.

Table 1: Freehold residential properties transferred in 1989 and 1990

	Percentage of transactions where price was	
	under £20,000	*over £100,000*
1989		
North	30	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	28	4
East Midlands	17	6
East Anglia	12	12
South East (excluding London)	7	24
Greater London	7	31
South West	11	17
West Midlands	22	7
North West	26	5
England	17	13
Wales	28	5
England and Wales	18	12
1990		
North	29	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	22	5
East Midlands	14	6
East Anglia	7	11
South East (excluding London)	5	21
Greater London	9	28
South West	10	13
West Midlands	20	6
North West	27	6
England	15	13
Wales	34	4
England and Wales	16	12

Source: Survey of Property Transactions 1989 and 1990

Table 2A
Sales of residential[1] properties by individuals

Numbers: thousands — *Average values: £ thousands*

1989	*Range of price (lower limits)*															
	£0		*£10,000*		*£20,000*		*£30,000*		*£50,000*		*£100,000*		*£250,000*		*All prices*	
	Numbers	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*
North	5	3	11	16	18	25	21	39	12	64	1	122	[2]—	395	67	35
Yorkshire and Humberside	7	3	19	16	36	26	46	39	28	66	5	138	[2]—	370	142	40
East Midlands	4	3	4	15	14	26	27	40	22	66	3	146	[2]—	385	75	49
East Anglia	3	3	2	15	2	24	6	41	14	68	3	143	1	370	30	65
South East[3]	10	3	6	14	6	25	17	42	113	71	39	141	5	377	198	84
Greater London	10	2	3	14	4	24	5	39	72	74	29	138	5	403	127	91
South West	6	2	3	14	4	25	15	43	46	68	14	139	2	373	91	72
West Midlands	7	3	7	15	17	26	36	41	31	68	7	143	1	350	105	51
North West	10	4	26	16	39	26	55	40	36	65	6	138	1	346	173	41
England	61	3	81	15	139	25	229	40	376	70	108	140	14	382	1,008	60
Wales	5	3	5	15	14	26	21	40	12	66	3	135	[2]—	363	60	44
England and Wales	65	3	86	15	154	25	250	40	388	69	111	140	15	381	1,069	59

[1] Includes freehold and leasehold properties.
[2] Less than 500.
[3] Excludes London.

Table 2B
Sales of residential[1] properties by individuals

Numbers: thousands *Average values: £ thousands*

1990	Range of price (lower limits) £0		£10,000		£20,000		£30,000		£50,000		£100,000		£250,000		All prices	
	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average	Numbers	Average
North	3	3	6	15	12	26	17	39	12	64	2	126	[2]—	351	53	41
Yorkshire and Humberside	6	3	5	16	15	26	[illegible]	40	23	65	4	138	[2]—	359	94	46
East Midlands	4	4	[illegible]	14	6	26	[illegible]	40	19	65	4	142	[2]—	399	66	50
East Anglia	2	3	1	12	2	25	13	42	15	67	3	133	[2]—	382	37	59
South East[3]	9	2	4	14	5	24	26	42	128	69	39	142	4	372	215	80
Greater London	9	2	3	14	2	25	6	41	68	73	28	143	4	414	120	90
South West	6	2	3	14	3	25	24	43	50	68	12	137	1	390	99	66
West Midlands	8	3	3	15	7	25	35	41	33	67	5	130	1	374	92	52
North West	8	3	11	15	18	26	52	39	33	65	6	138	[2]—	382	130	45
England	55	3	39	15	70	25	[illegible]	41	383	68	103	140	11	389	905	63
Wales	5	3	3	16	7	25	[illegible]	40	10	66	2	134	[2]—	375	43	43
England and Wales	60	3	42	15	78	25	259	40	393	68	105	140	11	388	948	62

[1] Includes freehold and leasehold properties.
[2] Less than 500.
[3] Excludes London.
Source: Survey of Property Transaction 1989 and 1990.

Table 3
Residential properties[1] transferred in 1988, 1989 and 1990

	1988		1989		1990	
	Freehold	All residential	Freehold	All residential	Freehold	All residential
(a) Percentage of properties under £20,000	17	19	18	20	16	17
Percentage share of value	3	3	3	4	2	3
(b) Percentage of properties over £100,000	12	10	12	11	12	11
Percentage share of value	33	31	37	34	34	32
(c) Median price	£48,000	£47,000	£45,000	£43,000	£50,000	£49,000
(d) Average price	£59,000	£57,000	£59,000	£56,000	£62,000	£59,000

Source: Survey of Property Transactions 1988, 1989 and 1990.
[1] Includes sales by individuals and other purchasers.

Money Laundering

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress of the Treasury working group on possible money laundering through casinos, bullion dealers, bureaux de change and through the legal and accountancy professions.

Mr. Maples: Priority is currently being given to measures to combat money laundering in the banking, insurance and financial services sectors. However, together with other interested Departments, we are examining the scope for tightening up procedures elsewhere. Consultations are proceeding with the law enforcement agencies on which other activities and professions are the most susceptible to being used for money laundering and we shall then begin discussions with the relevant representative bodies.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on section 39 reviews by the Bank of England on money laundering.

Mr. Maples: All institutions authorised under the Banking Act are expected to be able to demonstrate that they maintain adequate policies, records and systems to counter money laundering. The Bank of England notified these institutions in November 1989 that a review of control systems and accounting records in money laundering-related areas may form part of the report requested under section 39 of the Banking Act and a number of such reviews have been commissioned or have taken place.

Earnings

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the (i) weekly and (ii) annual *(a)* gross income and *(b)* taxable income of (1) a single person on half average earnings, (2) a single person on two thirds average earnings, (3) a single person on average earnings, (4) a single person on double average earnings, (5) a couple with the male partner on average earnings and a non-working wife and (6) a couple each earning male and female average earnings respectively in Scotland in 1990-91 and estimates for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Information for 1990-91 is given in the table. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances, other than the appropriate personal allowances, and no unearned income. Information for 1991-92 is not yet available.

	Weekly figures		Annual figures	
	Gross income[1]	Taxable income[2]	Gross income[1]	Taxable income[2]
(i) Single person[3] on half-average earnings	138·20	80·41	7,190	4,180
(ii) Single person[3] on two-thirds average earnings	184·30	126·51	9,580	6,580
(iii) Single person[3] on average earnings	276·40	218·61	14,370	11,370
(iv) Single person[3] on twice average earnings	552·80	495·01	28,750	25,740
(v) Married couple with husband on average earnings wife not working	276·40	185·53	14,370	9,650
(vi) Married couple with both partners on their respective average earnings	463·60	314·95	24,110	16,380

[1] Average earnings figures have been taken from the April 1990 New Earnings Survey.
[2] Gross income less allowances.
[3] The figures relating to a single person have been calculated using the figure for male average earnings.

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further meetings he has had with representatives of the civil service trade unions regarding pay and conditions of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Treasury Ministers meet representatives of the civil service trade unions from time to time. I last met representatives of the National Union of Civil and Public Servants and the Civil and Public Services Association on 9 April to discuss the Government's offers for the pay of executive and office support staff, and clerical and secretarial staff.

Environmental Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the decisions taken on environmental policy at *(a)* the development committee of G7 Finance Ministers on 29-30 April and *(b)* the global environmental facility meeting on 1-2 May.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The development committee of the World bank and IMF, which met on 30 April, welcomed the establishment of the joint World bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the United Nations Development Programme global environment facility—GEF. The committee underlined the role that this facility could play as the mechanism to provide additional assistance to developing countries in the framework of negotiations on the global environment.

Responsibility for the United Kingdom's policy on the GEF lies with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. I understand that good progress was made at the GEF meeting on 1 and 2 May. Participants broadly endorsed a first tranche of 26 projects, with a total value of about $275 million, to be taken forward by the three implementing agencies.

EC Structural Funds

Ms. Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any proposals to change the financial rules under which local authorities have to operate when applying for European regional development funds.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Income Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the costs in 1991-92 and 1992-93 of raising the basic rate income tax limit to (i) £25,000, (ii) £27,500 and (iii) £30,000.

Mr. Maude: Estimated revenue costs, compared with the Budget proposals, are in the table, which assumes statutory indexation of allowances and thresholds for 1992-93.

Basic rate limit in 1991-92 (£)	Effect on receipts in 1991-92	£ million 1992-93
25,000	190	320
27,500	490	840
30,000	750	1,270

Taxes and Benefits

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his written answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *560-62*, to include figures for 1991-92; if he will include any revisions to data for previous years; and whether it is yet possible to include data for the community charge.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 15 April 1991, at columns *13-20*. It will not be possible to produce estimates of the community charge until data from the 1990 family expenditure survey are available.

Credit Unions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many credit unions have been set up in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: The number of new credit unions registered over the period is as follows:

	England and Wales	Scotland
1986	9	4
1987	15	1
1988	33	11
1989	49	8
1990	55	17

There are currently 235 credit unions registered in England and Wales and 61 in Scotland.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Somalia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to Somalia in the last three months.

Mrs. Chalker: Security conditions in Somalia continue to make the delivery of relief aid difficult. The main relief effort is at present being carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross. I have this week approved a further £1 million to the ICRC for its Somali operations. This brings the total of our emergency aid to Somalia in the last three months to £1·238 million. We have also contributed £1·2 million for Somalia refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Engagements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to the answer by the Minister for Overseas Development to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), *Official Report*, 26 April, columns 579-80, he will list the non-governmental organisations met on 15 April.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of: the British Red Cross, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, CARE Britain, Christian Aid, Concern, Oxfam, the Refugee Council of Great Britain and the Save the Children Fund.

Aid Budget

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the revised planning figures for the aid budget in 1990-91, and the planned figures for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 in current terms, and constant 1990-91 terms, showing any percentage real change.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

	Column (a)[1] *Original planning Figure in Cash (£ million)*	*Column (b)*[2] *Revised Provision in Cash Terms (£ million)*	*Column (a) In 1990-91 Prices (£ million)*	*Column (b) In 1990-91 Prices (£ million)*	*Column (a) Percentage Real Terms Change on 1990-91*	*Column (b) Percentage Real Terms Change on 1990-91*
1990-91	1,587	1,619	1,587	1,619	——	——
1991-92	1,721	1,751	1,600	1,636	3·09	1·05
1992-93	1,790	1,790	1,601	1,601	0·88	−1·11
1993-94	1,860	1,860	1,603	1,603	1·01	−0·99

[1] The figure for 1990-91 was the budget figure published in the 1990 Public Expenditure White Paper Cm. 1021 before the financial year began. The figures for later years are those agreed in the 1990 PES round and published in the FCO Departmental Report Cm. 1502.
[2] The figure for 1990-91 reflects additions to the aid budget for developing countries made during the year. The figure for 1991-92 includes the addition to the aid budget of £30 million for humanitarian assistance announced on 29 April.

Rhino Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions are being made by Her Majesty's Government to schemes designed to protect the rhinoceros.

Mrs. Chalker: A list of the wildlife conservation activities in Africa in which we are involved is in the Library of the House.

Bangladesh

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all contributions of emergency relief for Bangladesh made by other donors of which he is aware.

Mrs. Chalker: From reports provided by a number of sources including the United Nations Office of the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator—UNDRO—and the British high commission in Dhaka, we are aware of the following pledges made by other donors up to 13 May. These do not, in all cases, distinguish between contributions for immediate emergency relief and longer-term rehabilitation assistance. The figures are improving daily.

Australia—US$2·216 million (£1·3 million)
Belgium—BF25 million (£0·41 million)
Bhutan—US$120,000 (£0·07 million)
Burma—500 tonnes of rice
Canada—Canadian $1·5 million (£0·77 million)
China—US$2 million (£1·18 million)
Denmark—DK250,000 (£0·023 million)
European Community 10 million ECU (£6·97 million)
France—US$2 million (£1·18 million) plus 20,000 tonnes of wheat, 2,000 tonnes of milk powder, a telecommunications repair team and the services of a dredger
Germany—DM30 million (£10·14 million)
Holland—Guilders 6 million (£1·78 million)
India—Taka 200 million (£3·51 million) plus US$700,000 (£0·413 million) and 6 helicopters
Indonesia—1 C130 aircraft
Iran—Relief supplies
Ireland—US$198,000 (£0·12m)
Italy—US$8m (£4·72m) plus 40 tonnes of relief supplies
Japan—US$21m (£12·39m)—comprising US$9·5m cash, US$11m food aid and US$0·5m emergency equipment
Malaysia—US$370,000 (£0·22m)
New Zealand—US$29,000 (£0·017m)
Norway—US$0·34m (£0·2m)
Pakistan—Relief supplies plus 2 helicopters
Saudi Arabia—US$100m (£59m) for rehabilitation plus immediate relief supplies and 3 C130 aircraft
Sri Lanka—Relief supplies
Switzerland—US$0·14m (£0·08m) plus 36 tonnes of high protein food and logistical support staff
Thailand—£470,000 plus 2 helicopters and 20,000 tonnes of rice
Turkey—Relief supplies
USA—US$6·9m (£4·07m) plus 5 helicopters
UNDP—US$50,000 (£0·03m)
UNICEF—US$1·02m (£0·6m)
UNDRO—US$50,000 (£0·03m)
WFP—7,000 tonnes of food
WHO—4 emergency health kits

We also await firm details of further logistical support being considered by the United States of America.

ODA Expenditure

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will revise the planned expenditure estimates for the Overseas Development Administration for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 to achieve increases in real terms.

Mrs. Chalker: As the hon. Member is aware from the reply she received from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 29 April, at column *31*, the aid programme for 1991-92 has recently been increased by £30 million. The planning figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 will be reviewed in the annual public expenditure survey round later this year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Government Finance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures for the number of persons on income support who have (i) poll tax arrears for which they are subject to a liability order, (ii) social fund loan repayments, (iii) gas and electricity arrears, (iv) rent arrears and (v) other debt.

Miss Widdecombe: At the end of February 1991 there were 36,448 income support claimants with deductions for arrears of community charge. At the end of March 1991, there was an estimated 424,000 income support claimants with deductions for recovery of social fund loans.

Figures for the number of income support claimants with deductions for electricity, gas, rent arrears and other items are contained in table 10 of the "Department of Social Security Income Support Statistics Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1989", a copy of which is in the Library. It is important to note that some of these deductions are for current charges only.

State Benefits

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what state benefits are discounted when assessments are made of the income of applicants for discretionary rebate benefits such as poll tax and housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Housing benefit and community charge benefit are statutory benefits and people on income support have entitlement to maximum benefit in each case.

Community charge benefit is disregarded when calculating entitlement to housing benefit and vice versa. Otherwise, social security benefits are taken into account, except for mobility allowance, constant attendance allowance, attendance allowance and any resettlement benefit or social fund payment.

Mobility supplement and constant attendance allowance which is paid as part of a war disability pension are also disregarded. There is a statutory £10 weekly disregard of a war widow's or war disablement pension, and local authorities have discretion of disregard in excess of this amount. Special payments to pre-1973 war widows are fully disregarded.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the yields from raising the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions in 1991-92 and 1992-93 to (i) £23,700, (ii) £25,000, (iii) £27,500 and (iv) £30,000.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Additional contribution yield (£ millions)

(1) UEL raised to	*(2) 1991-92*	*(3) 1992-93*[1]
£23,700	250	275
£25,000	325	375
£27,500	425	475
£30,000	500	575

[1] Figures for 1992-93 assume that the present UEL and the figures in column 1 are increased in line with 1991 Budget assumptions for price inflation.

Delayed Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps have been taken by his Department to inform hon. Members of the Department's compensation scheme for delayed payments;

(2) what system exists for compensating those whose pension or benefit is paid more than a year late; and if he will publish the rules which govern such a system;

(3) how many individuals received compensation payments for delayed payments for each of the years for which figures are available; and how many claims for such payments were unsuccessful.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 11 March, 1991, c. 416]:* I regret that there was an error in the figure given for the number of payments in 1989-90. The correct information is in the table.

Ex-gratia compensation may be paid when payment of benefit amounting to £50 or more has either been delayed for 12 months or longer, or interrupted for at least three months, because of clear and unambiguous official error. If claimants do not themselves raise the matter, the Department's local offices are required to identify cases eligible to be considered for such compensation. These arrangements are in accordance with the general principles concerning ex-gratia payments in "Government Accounting", the Treasury's guide to accounting and financial procedures in Government. Each case is decided within those general principles, taking into account its particular facts and circumstances, which vary widely from case to case. The annual reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration have drawn attention to the availability of compensation.

Payments have been made as follows:

Year	*Number of individual payments*
1989-90	402
1988-89	529
1987-88	911
1986-87	654
1985-86	540
1984-85	171

Information on the number of unsuccessful cases is not available.

Benefits

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for each of a single wage married couple *(a)* with two children aged four and six years and *(b)* with three children aged three, eight and 11 years earning (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110, (vii) £120, (viii) £130, (ix) £140, (x) £150, (xi) £160 and (xii) £170 under the benefit system as uprated in April 1991;

(2) if he will publish figures, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged four and six years under the benefit system as uprated in April 1991 and in each of the following circumstances *(a)* not working, after one year on benefits, *(b)* earning £20 a week from part-time working and *(c)* working full-time and earning (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110 and (vii) £120 per week.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Income-related benefits such as family credit and housing benefit provide valuable help for many working families and make it worth while taking up and retaining employment. The social security reforms, and subsequent changes in tax and national insurance have virtually eliminated the worst effects of the poverty trap, so that it is now virtually impossible for someone to be worse off as a result of an increase in gross pay.

The information requested is set out in the tables. It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay. A community charge level of £250 per person, per annum is assumed. All other assumptions are as in the published tax/benefit model tables.

Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6

	Earnings (£s)										
	60	*70*	*80*	*90*	*100*	*110*	*120*	*130*	*140*	*150*	*160*	*170*
Deductions from earnings												
Tax	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	2·28	4·78	7·28	9·78	12·28	14·78	17·28	19·78
National insurance	2·18	3·08	3·98	4·88	5·78	6·68	7·58	8·48	9·38	10·28	11·18	12·08
Rent	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60
Community charge	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62
Net earnings	22·60	31·70	40·80	49·90	56·72	63·32	69·92	76·52	83·12	89·72	96·32	102·92
Additional income from benefits												
Family credit	57·70	54·43	48·06	41·69	36·92	32·30	27·68	23·06	18·44	13·82	9·20	4·58
Child benefit	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50	15·50
Housing benefit	9·92	6·13	4·36	2·58	1·25	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00
Community charge benefit	4·08	3·20	2·79	2·38	2·08	1·78	1·48	1·19	0·89	0·59	0·30	0·00
Disposable income	109·80	110·96	111·51	112·05	112·47	112·90	114·58	116·27	117·95	119·63	121·32	123·00

Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11

Earnings (£s)	*60*	*70*	*80*	*90*	*100*	*110*	*120*	*130*	*140*	*150*	*160*	*170*
Tax	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	2·28	4·78	7·28	9·78	12·28	14·78	17·28	19·78
NI	2·18	3·08	3·98	4·88	5·78	6·68	7·58	8·48	9·38	10·28	11·18	12·08
Rent	25·60	25·60	26·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60
CC	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62	9·62
Net Earnings	22·60	31·70	40·80	49·90	56·72	63·32	69·92	76·52	83·12	89·72	96·32	102·92
FC	73·80	70·53	64·16	57·79	53·02	48·40	43·78	39·16	34·54	29·92	25·30	20·68
CHB	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75	22·75
HB	7·58	3·79	2·02	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00
CCB	3·54	2·66	2·25	1·84	1·54	1·24	0·94	0·65	0·35	0·05	0·00	0·00
Disposable Income	130·27	131·43	131·98	132·28	134·03	135·71	137·79	139·08	140·76	142·44	144·37	146·35

NI = National Insurance.
CC = Community Charge.
CCB = Community Charge Benefit.
HB = Housing Benefit.
FC = Family Credit.
CHB = Child Benefit.

Lone parent with two children aged 4 and 6

	Per cent.
(a) not working, after one year on benefit	
Income Support	57·65
Child Benefit[1]	21·10
Rent Rebate	25·60
Community Charge Benefit	3·85
Total Net Income[2]	113·15
Net Income after Rent and Community Charge	82·74

	Per cent.
(b) earning £20 per week from part-time earnings	
Income Support	52·65
Child Benefit[1]	21·10
Rent Rebate	25·60
Community Charge Benefit	3·85
Earnings	20·00

	Per cent.
Total Net Income[2]	128·15
Net Income after Rent and Community Charge	97·74

Notes:
[1] Child Benefit includes One Parent Benefit.
[2] Net Income after Rent and Community Charge includes the notional value of free school meals and welfare foods.

(c) Lone parent with two children aged 4 and 6, working full time

	Earnings						
	£60	*£70*	*£80*	*£90*	*£100*	*£110*	*£120*
Tax	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	2·28	4·78	7·28
National Insurance	2·18	3·08	3·98	4·88	5·78	6·68	7·58
Rent	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60	25·60
Community Charge	4·81	4·81	4·81	4·81	4·81	4·81	4·81
NET EARNINGS	27·40	36·51	45·61	54·71	61·53	68·13	74·73
Family Credit	57·70	54·43	48·06	41·69	36·92	32·30	27·68
Child Benefit and One Parent Benefit	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00
Housing Benefit	7·87	4·08	2·31	0·54	0·00	0·00	0·00
Community Charge Benefit	21·10	21·10	21·10	21·10	21·10	21·10	21·10
DISPOSABLE INCOME	114·08	116·12	117·08	118·04	119·55	121·53	123·51

HEALTH

Handicapped and Mentally Ill People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the number of adults with *(a)* mental handicap, *(b)* mental illness and *(c)* physical handicap in any format in which this information is available.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of people registered with local authorities in England under the provisions of the National Assistance Act 1948 as being physically disabled is published in "Registers of Physically Disabled Persons (General Classes) at 31 March 1990, England"—Ref. AF90/19—a copy of which is available in the Library. Estimates of the prevalence within Great Britain of a number of conditions giving rise to disability, including mental handicap, mental illnesses and various categories of physical disability, are given in the report published in September 1988 by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "The prevalence of disability among adults", a copy of which is also available in the Library.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what preparations have been made for the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are on target for implementation of the Act as a whole on 14 October. The commencement order has been made and was published on 9 April. Twenty volumes of draft regulations and guidance were issued for consultation last year; these form the basis of the first five volumes of the guidance and regulations which the Department is producing. Copies of volumes 1 on court orders, 2 on family support, day care and educational provision for young children, 3 on family placements and 5 on independent schools have been distributed widely. Volume 4 on residential care will be published this month. A total of 16,000 free copies have been sent to social services departments. We are also producing supporting material which will be issued in substantial quantities.

Further volumes of draft regulations and guidance on the remaining areas of the Act will be issued shortly.

A great deal of training material has been produced for use in the field. A total of £875,000 has been spent on centrally produced training materials. The training support programme for 1991-92 will be used to fund further centrally produced materials.

The centrally commissioned training projects which have been launched so far include a pack produced by the Open university which provides a basic introduction to the Act, in particular to its overall philosophy and objectives. A separate pack with common material has been prepared for the magistracy.

Leicester university has produced a guide for councillors on local authority support for children and families, outlining the powers and duties of local authorities contained in part III of the Act and addressing some key policy and resource issues. Leicester university has also produced a manual on part III for senior officers which will cover the new approach required by the Act, legal aspects, policy issues and suggested strategies for managing family support services.

The Family Rights Group is preparing a training pack to provide social workers and their managers with a thorough understanding of the new approach to working with families and the inter-relationship of the law and practice in the context of partnership and family support. The material will be available in July.

The National Children's Bureau has produced materials to help local authority social services staff carry out the responsibilities in relation to court orders which may be obtained for child protection. This was launched on 1 May.

The National Children's Bureau is also producing a training pack concerned with day care and child minding services. It is targeted at officers with responsibility for registration and inspection and their line managers. This package will be available later this month.

The National Children's Bureau has been running a series of seminars to increase awareness of the Act within the NHS. The material which we commissioned from the Open university is aimed at everyone who has responsibility for children and families and we hope that it will be widely used. The Association of Directors of Social

Services, the National Children's Home and the London Boroughs Training Commission have together run a series of Department of Health-funded training workshops aimed at and attended by people from a variety of disciplines.

The Department of Health has provided £250,000 for the provision of training for staff working in the voluntary sector which the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations have agreed to administer.

The Department is working on a programme to publicise the Act; this will involve material for the general public and for interested organisations such as citizens' advice bureaux, including a video; we are running a "clearing house" to enable information on developments and projects to be exchanged nationally, by means of a highly successful newsletter, "Implementation News".

A great deal of activity is also taking place in local authorities, health authorities, voluntary organisations and colleges. The Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office have their own programmes. We are confident that by October 14 everyone will be ready for implementation.

Wath Recycling

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of which of the poisonous chemicals held at the premises of Wath Recycling are considered to be potentially the most harmful to health.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that material for recycling delivered to the Wath site was found to be contaminated with pesticides. Responsibility for the control and safety of toxic waste is a matter for the South Yorkshire waste disposal authority, a statutory body set up by the local authorities in the area. They are advised by the Health and Safety Executive. The Department can advise local authorities or Government Departments on possible health effects of chemicals if asked to do so.

Disability Information Project

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the national organisations which are taking part in the national disability information project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We expect that all national organisations with an interest in providing information to disabled people, their carers and service providers will wish to take some part in ensuring the success of this project. Applications for pilot projects involving federations of local information providers and invitations to tender for the role of project team to manage the overall project will be invited during the summer.

The Department is also planning a conference in the autumn which all interested organisations will be eligible to attend. Delegates will then have an opportunity to discuss their involvement in the project with the project team and those local federations of information providers which will have been selected as pilot projects.

Chernobyl

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what computer and data collection resources have been offered to the Soviet authorities since May 1986 to assist the epidemiological and demographic health studies of people contaminated with fall-out from the Chernobyl accident.

Mr. Dorrell: United Kingdom scientists are participating in various international activities, under the auspices of bodies such as the World Health Organisation—WHO—the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the European Community, aimed at monitoring and mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. The United Kingdom is actively discussing with other WHO member states in Europe what further actions can be taken.

Appendectomies

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the price of an appendectomy at each hospital in England; and at what 10 hospitals are these operations most frequently successful.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on pre-arranged contracts is not held centrally. Regional health authorities have been asked to publish tariff lists for extra-contractual referrals for all the provider units in their region, including national health service trusts, and these will be deposited in the Library when available. Information on outcomes of individual operations is not collected centrally.

Electoral Register

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by constituency, the number of electors registered to vote in the new electoral register.

Mr. Dorrell: A listing of the 1991 parliamentary electorates by constituency is available in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Brewing

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Taunton of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *480*, what is his estimate of the number of the 11,000 public houses required to be disposed of by major brewers which are likely to be purchased by the regional brewer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order requires national brewers to release from ties half the pubs they own in excess of 2,000 by November 1992. Selling pubs to regional brewers is only one way of complying with this requirement available to national brewers. The industry estimates that about 2,000 of the 11,000 pubs freed from ties may be sold to regional brewers. Precise figures will be available when the Director General of Fair Trading carries out his review of the measures introduced since the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report in late 1993.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Taunton of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *480*, what information he has on the number of existing public house licensees who may be assisted by banks or other financial institutions to purchase or lease pubs not

bought by regional brewers; what measures his Department is taking to facilitate such assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order requires brewers owning more than 2,000 pubs to release from ties half they own in excess of 2,000 by November 1992. Some 11,000 pubs are expected to be freed from ties as a result of this requirement. Pubs may be freed in a number of ways. It is not possible at this stage to estimate how many of these are likely to be purchased or leased free of ties by existing licensees. The price at which brewers sell pubs and the terms on which others are leased are matters for commercial negotiation. No special government assistance is envisaged.

Research and Development

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will examine methods of amending the Companies Acts to require the inclusion of research and development expenditures by United Kingdom companies in their published accounts, with particular relevance to the revelation of competitive advantages or otherwise.

Mr. Redwood: Readers of accounts of public and large private companies already benefit from the disclosure of expenditure on research and development which is now required by "Statement of Standard Accounting Practice 13" as revised. This new requirement took effect only for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 January 1989, and I see no present need to provide for additional disclosure under the Companies Act.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give full details of the United Kingdom's participation in the EC European strategic programme for research and development in information technology—ESPRIT—and Rapid Action for Conductive Education—RACE—research programmes with particular relevance to the complementarity of official United Kingdom non-EC programmes in similar fields sponsored by his Department.

Mr. Leigh: United Kingdom organisations are participating in over 70 per cent. of projects under the ESPRIT II programme and in 83 per cent. of projects under the RACE programme. The United Kingdom leads in 21 per cent. of projects under ESPRIT II and in 26 per cent. of projects under RACE. United Kingdom organisations have succeeded in securing nearly 18 per cent. of the available funds under ESPRIT II and nearly 20 per cent. of the funds under RACE.

The Government actively seek complementarity as far as possible between Community and national research programmes. National programmes help to strengthen the United Kingdom's technology base and hence encourage more effective United Kingdom participation in Community research and development programmes. European Community programmes are often particularly appropriate for funding research towards common standards, for example, open systems for information technology and communications.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the latest available figures for the amounts received by United Kingdom companies from EC collaborative research and development programmes and the amounts contributed by his Department to this same chapter of the Community general budget in the same period.

Mr. Leigh: United Kingdom organisations are very successful in bidding for Community research and development funding. They secure approximately 20 per cent. of the overall funds available under the Community's research and development framework programme. This is broadly comparable to the indicative United Kingdom contribution to the research and development chapter of the EC budget.

The indicative United Kingdom contribution to the research and development chapter of the 1991 EC Budget is estimated to be some £195 million of which approximately 50 per cent.—some £98 million—relates to research and development for the industrial programmes.

Metrication (Spirits)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* the number and sources of responses he has received to proposals for metricating the quantities in which whisky, gin, rum and vodka may be served for consumption on licensed premises; and if he will make a statement on proposals affecting other spirits and liqueurs and the timetable for any changes.

Mr. Leigh: I have received 39 replies to my Department's consultation paper from trade interests, consumer organisations, enforcement bodies and others. I am considering these replies and I shall be announcing my conclusions in due course.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the reasons why no British firms have submitted bids for the Insurance Services Group division of ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it would not be appropriate to reveal information on discussions with United Kingdom firms.

Environmental Management

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet British representatives of the International Chamber of Commerce, co-organisers of the Rotterdam environmental management conference, to discuss the utility and implementation in the United Kingdom of the world industry conference on environmental management recommendations.

Mr. Leigh: I welcome the outcome of WICEM II and the support given to the business charter for sustainable development which was launched at the conference. I anticipate an early meeting with representatives of the International Chamber of Commerce to discuss the United Kingdom business response.

Investment Services and Capital Adequacy Directives

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress in negotiations on the draft investment services and capital adequacy directives.

Mr. Redwood: The draft investment services directive was discussed at ECOFIN on 8 April. The difficulties created by the proposal, originally put forward by France, that certain transactions should be confined to "regulated markets" have yet to be resolved. Member states' officials continue to seek the basis for a satisfactory solution and a further ECOFIN discussion is planned for 3 June. It looks increasingly difficult to complete negotiations on the directive during the Luxembourg presidency.

In addition to the regulated markets issue, there are a number of other important issues still to be resolved. These include the question of whether natural persons, appointed representatives and members of the professions should be included in the scope of the directive. The Government are seeking to ensure that natural persons will be included but that there will be a satisfactory exclusion for members of the professions.

On all these issues, the Government remain firmly committed to the principle that the investment services directive should be a genuinely liberalising measure which must not compromise the ability of investors anywhere in the European Community to choose how to invest their money.

There has as yet been no ECOFIN discussion of the draft capital adequacy directive. Discussions between officials have made some progress towards agreement on the treatment of market risk, but the definition of capital and a number of other important technical issues have yet to be resolved. Negotiations are likely to continue into the Dutch presidency. The Government's objective remains a directive that imposes capital standards protecting investors without imposing an unnecessary burden on practitioners. Capital required should be related to risks run.

On both directives the Government are continuing closely to consult interested parties in the United Kingdom to ensure that we can achieve the best possible outcome for United Kingdom investors and United Kingdom investment firms and financial markets, though since both directives are ultimately subject to qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers the final outcome may not fully satisfy all our negotiating objectives.

Exports (USSR)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to continue to provide Export Credits Guarantee Department cover for exports to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Sainsbury: ECGD cover for export credits for the Soviet Union is currently being reviewed.

Exit Strategies

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will show in tabular form how much money has been allocated by his inner city unit for establishing exit strategies; and if he will break these totals down for each strategy between *(a)* feasibility/business plans, *(b)* revenue costs and *(c)* capital sums to establish projects.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* Each task force has a budget of about £1 million annually for the support of projects, but there is no specific allocation for exit strategies: consequently, the information is not available in the form requested.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the actual amount spent by the Health and Safety Executive in each year from 1985-86 to 1990-91.

Mr. Forth: The actual amounts spent by the Health and Safety Commission in each year from 1985-86 to 1989-90 were:

Year	*Expenditure £000s*
1985-86	97,694
1986-87	100,384
1987-88	101,388
1988-89	109,500
1989-90	119,607

Expenditure figures for 1990-91 will be published in the Health and Safety Commission's annual report for 1990-91. The commission's expenditure is financed from grant in aid and from receipts, mainly from fees and charges.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money was provided as grant in aid to the Health and Safety Executive in the years 1985-86 to 1990-91.

Mr. Forth: Money provided as grant in aid to the Health and Safety Commission in each of the years 1985-86 to 1990-91 was:

Year	*Grant in aid £000s*
1985-86	93,283
1986-87	94,334
1987-88	94,235
1988-89	97,390
1989-90	102,974
1990-91	120,354

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff years of experience have been lost by the Health and Safety Executive over the past three years among professional/scientific staff researching and developing health-related topics.

Mr. Forth: A total of 90 staff years of experience has been lost, about half of which was due to transfers to other Government laboratories, and about a quarter of which was due to resignations.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the level of funding proposed for the Health and Safety Executive, following the transfer of the offshore safety division, in 1991-92, and 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Forth: Gross planned provision for the Health and Safety Commission as announced in February 1991 in the "Government's Expenditure Plans, 1991-92 to 1993-94: Department of Employment" was:

	Provision £ million
1991-92	184
1992-93	196
1993-94	213

These figures do not include provision for offshore safety work. A supplementary estimate will be presented seeking provision for 1991-92.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the staff numbers and real cost of the Health and Safety Executive in 1980 and 1990; and how many new responsibilities have been given to the Health and Safety Executive in that period.

Mr. Forth: On 1 April 1980 and 1 April 1990, totals of 4,218 and 3,698 staff respectively were in post in the Health and Safety Executive. At constant prices, gross provision for the Health and Safety Commission in 1980-81 was £144·1 million and in 1990-91, it was £171·5 million.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 laid upon the Health and Safety Commission and Executive responsibility for virtually all aspects of industrial health and safety, and most aspects of the protection of the public from work activity. Within this overall competence, the commission and executive have acquired the following new responsibilities since 1980:

(i) carriage by road, classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances;
(ii) notification of new substances before they are placed on the market and of existing substances;
(iii) action under the European directive on the control of industrial major accident hazards, including new responsibility for protection of the environment from hazardous installations;
(iv) mains gas safety;
(v) asbestos licensing;
(vi) the enforcement of part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act and its related Control of Pesticides Regulations;
(vii) responsibility under the Control of Pesticides Regulations for the registration and assessment of non-agricultural pesticides;
(viii) new and expanded nuclear safety work, including nuclear safety research;
(ix) health and safety on railways.

In addition, new or substantially expanded work has been acquired in connection with the control of dangerous substances in harbour areas, radiation and noise, and the health and safety implications of the development and use of new technology including programmable electronics and biotechnology. There has also been a significant growth of EC activity and directives in areas affecting safety and health, and a significant growth in public and international interest in relevant environmental and major hazards issues.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff years of experience have been lost by the Health and Safety Executive over the past three years among professional-scientific staff researching and developing safety-related topics.

Mr. Forth: A total of 368 staff years of experience has been lost, the vast majority of which was due to retirement.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he has given to establishing equal opportunities special needs units using the expertise of specialist staff such as psychologists, social workers, nurses and doctors already in the Department to assist industry with particular equal opportunity problems.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has many specialist staff who already help employers wanting advice or assistance in a number of areas which involve individuals with special needs. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment recently announced that the Employment Service's specialist disability services would be integrated into a specialist advisory and assessment service. This will help give people with disabilities more equality of opportunity in the labour market.

Employment Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future need for social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists and instructional officers within the Employment Service.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Disabled People

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what responses he has had from organisations representing people with disabilities to the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Jackson: More than 400 responses have been received to the consultative document many of which are from organisations representing people with disabilities or their interests including committees for the employment of disabled people and voluntary organisations.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what input from organisations representing disabled people was considered in preparing the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Jackson: In preparing the consultative document the Department took into account the views and information derived from a wide variety of contacts maintained between this Department and organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, people with disabilities.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice was sought and from whom before the preparation of the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Jackson: The consultative document was preceded by a review of this Department's employment and training services for people with disabilities. This included consideration of a report on developing employment provisions for disabled people—the Tomlinson principles—by the National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People and the conclusions of the Public Accounts Committee in its report on employment assistance to disabled adults. The views and information derived from contacts maintained between this Department and organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, people with disabilities were also taken into account.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to make a statement following his consultation on the document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Jackson: As a result of consultations on the document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" my right hon. and learned Friend has already announced changes to the local and national committees that provide us with advice on the employment of people with disabilities and improvements to the specialist services to people with disabilities. We are currently considering the many responses we have received on other issues raised in the consultative document.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Health and Safety Executive requires in writing confirmation that sub-sea isolation valves are fitted to the main export lines where there is the likelihood of a large release of combustible material in the event of rupture.

Mr. Forth: No. Recommendation No. 44 of the Cullen report stated that there should be no immediate requirement for sub-sea isolation valves to be fitted on pipelines connected to installations. Instead, operators should demonstrate that adequate provision has been made against hazards from risers and pipelines, as part of the safety case which the report recommended should be required for each offshore installation.

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Health and Safety Executive has now implemented the requirement that offshore oil operators draw up harmonised permit to work systems

Mr. Forth: In recommendation 34 of the report of the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster, Lord Cullen recognised that standardisation of the permit to work system throughout the industry was neither necessary nor practicable. Howevever, he recommended that the industry itself should seek to increase harmonisation, with particular reference to proposals for guidelines that had been made by a working group of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association—UKOOA—and which were outlined in the body of the report. I understand that UKOOA, together with representatives of other offshore organisations, has now produced draft guidance, which it aims to publish later this year following consultation within the industry.

Teaching Unions

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the membership of each teaching trade union; and what information he has on how many members are trainee/student teachers and how many are retired members.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The total membership of each teaching trade union known to the Employment Department is shown in the table. A breakdown of trainee/student teachers and retired members is not available.

Union	[1] *Membership*
Assistant Masters and Mistresses' Association	135,930
The Association of Agricultural Education Staffs	1,418
Association of Cambridge University Assistants	1,082
Association of Career Teachers	491
Association of Educational Psychologists	1,615
Association for College Management	1,490
Association of Principals of Colleges	665
Association of University Teachers	31,807
Association of Vice Principals of Colleges	111
British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education	353
The Educational Institute of Scotland	45,571
Scottish Further and Higher Education Association	1,822
The Headmasters' Conference	355
The National Association of Head Teachers	35,238
National Association of Inspectors and Educational Advisers	2,048
National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers	163,646
National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education	81,407
National Society for Education in Art and Design	2,289
National Union of Teachers	213,482
Professional Association of Nursery Nurses	3,153
Professional Association of Teachers	42,793
Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association	7,278
Secondary Heads' Association	7,452
Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru	3,061

[1] The latest published figures relate to year ending 1989.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Grey Squirrels

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are taken by his Department to control the grey squirrel population.

Mr. Maclean: The responsibility for controlling grey squirrels lies with the owners or occupiers of land. A number of legal methods of control are available and our advisory service provides guidance on request.

NGOs (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Curry: The readily available information about the appointments for which this Department is responsible, a number of which will fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is given in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations" copies of which are in the Library.

International Whaling Commission

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure continuance of the International Whaling Commission's indefinite moratorium on whaling by all signatory states.

Mr. Gummer: I have taken a strong stand, both as Minister of State and Minister, on the importance of conserving whale stocks and I have repeatedly stated my determination that no whale stock should again be over-exploited by man.

We will not even contemplate the lifting of the moratorium on commercial whaling unless and until it is

clear that whale stocks are at healthy levels, a satisfactory and robust management procedure is in place and the methods used to take whales are humane. We shall continue to press our view strongly at the forthcoming meeting of the International Whaling Commission. These conditions have clearly not been met.

Fermor-Hesketh Estate (Poisoning)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *479*, if he will place in the Library the report of the Ministry investigations officer into the poisoning incident in April 1990 on the Fermor-Hesketh estate.

Mr. Maclean: Reports by investigating officers are internal documents intended for use when considering legal proceedings. Moreover, since investigation officer reports include details of individuals who are not under investigation, and who have not been charged with any offence, it would be entirely inappropriate to release the reports.

Irradiation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to *(a)* license irradiation plants in the United Kingdom, *(b)* give approval to irradiation plants in non-EC countries and *(c)* give authorisation to irradiation plants in EC countries to import irradiated food into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Licensing Authority for England and Wales has received one application under the Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990, for approval to irradiate various dried spices and condiments. We will announce our decision on this application when our full evaluation is completed. No applications have yet been received in respect of food irradiation plants abroad.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to publish the results of his tests on cattle for enzootic bovine leukosis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A small pilot survey is currently taking place to gather information on the likely number of herds infected with EBL in Great Britain. Premises tested cannot be identified from the samples, but the findings of the survey will be made public when analysis of the results is completed.

Farm Waste (Pollution)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to publish his next report on water pollution from farm waste in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have agreed with the National Rivers Authority that the 1990 farm waste statistics will be presented within a comprehensive report by the authority covering both agricultural and non-agricultural pollution. I understand that the authority hopes to publish this report shortly.

ENERGY

Opencast Sites

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Coal regarding the development by private mining companies of opencast sites.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Energy Consumption

19. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the increase in energy consumption in the United Kingdom in 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: Total final energy consumption in the United Kingdom in 1990 was 0·7 per cent. higher than in 1989.

Wind and Tidal Power

20. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of Government spending on wind and tidal power in 1979; and what was the expenditure in real terms in 1990.

Mr. Moynihan: In the financial year 1979-80 my Department spent £0·6 million on wind energy research and £0·6 million on tidal power research. In 1990-91 the figures were £4·5 million for wind and £1·9 million for tidal.

Licensing

21. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of the 12th and frontier rounds of licensing.

Mr. Wakeham: I hope to be able to announce awards made under both these rounds later this month.

Coal Industry

22. **Mr. Lester:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the Government's investment in the coal industry since 1979.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since 1979 we have assisted British Coal in financing over £7 billion of new investment.

Cornwall Geothermal Energy Project

23. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many representations he has received regarding the cut in funding for the Cornwall geothermal energy project.

Mr. Moynihan: Since I announced details of the new £3·3 million programme of hot dry rock geothermal research on 1 February 1991, I have received written comments from five sources.

British Coal

24. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of Government investment and grant aid in British Coal between 1974 and 1979 and between 1979 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

27. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of Government investment and grant aid in British Coal between 1974 and 1979 and between 1979 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Between 1974 and 1979 the Government assisted British Coal in financing £1,475 million of new investment and provided £401 million in grant aid. Between 1979 and 1990 the figures were £7,212 million and £14,826 million respectively. At March 1990 prices this comprises an average level of investment and grant of £843 million and £231 million per year for the years 1974 to 1979 compared with £940 million and £1,630 million respectively for the years 1979 to 1990.

Nuclear Power

25. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement as to the contribution of nuclear power to environmental protection.

Mr. Wakeham: The main contribution of nuclear power to environmental protection is its role in curbing acid rain and combating global warming. Nuclear power stations emit practically no sulphur dioxides or nitrous oxides, which are the principal constituents of acid rain, or carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas. If the electricity currently provided by nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom was generated by coal, our total carbon emissions would increase by 15 million tonnes per year, an increase of 10 per cent. over present levels.

The 1994 review of nuclear power will include consideration of its environmental impact.

Energy Efficiency Rating

26. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action he is taking to achieve a uniform national energy efficiency rating for houses and other buildings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department continues to encourage and support the National Energy Foundation and MVM Starpoint in their joint project to develop a means by which their two systems for energy efficiency labelling of houses can be compared.

As regards the labelling of other buildings, the Energy Efficiency Office is in touch with developments at the Building Research Establishment and elsewhere and will keep these under review.

Energy Efficiency and Renewables

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much Government spending on *(a)* energy efficiency and *(b)* renewable energy has increased in real terms since 1979-80.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department's expenditure in 1979-80 on energy efficiency and renewables was £2·4 million and £8·2 million respectively, in cash terms. Revalued to current—1991-92—terms, these sums would be £5·6 million for energy efficiency, compared with estimated expenditure for 1991-92 of £41·9 million, or 648 per cent., and £18·97 million for renewables, compared with estimated expenditure for 1991-92 of £24·5 million, or 29 per cent.

Euratom

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what organisation applies safeguards to the Euratom research reactors and nuclear material used for experimentation by Euratom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All nuclear material in use by Euratom is under safeguards, as provided for in Infcirc 193 —agreement between the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Euratom non-nuclear weapons states— and under the safeguards arrangements set out in chapter VII of the Euratom treaty 1957.

Spent Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), *Official Report*, 25 April, column *497*, he will set out the form of assurances covering peaceful use commitment on plutonium that are acceptable to Her Majesty's Government; and if he will list the dates on which such assurances have been received from foreign Governments for plutonium exported to date.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All exports of nuclear materials, equipment and technology are made within the guidelines as set out in the statement by the then Foreign Secretary, now Lord Callaghan, on 31 March 1976 at columns *514-16*. These include the requirement to seek an assurance that the export will not be used to manufacture nuclear explosives for any purpose.

The dates on which these assurances have been received from overseas Governments for exports of plutonium could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Research and Development

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 25 April, column *500*, he will indicate *(a)* when he expects the Energy Council to adopt the three proposed energy research programmes and *(b)* how the parts of the 1990-94 third framework programme on energy research and development have been funded to date.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A common position has been reached on the proposed non-nuclear energies programme of the third framework programme. Under the co-operation procedure the European Parliament will now consider the programme, which should finally be adopted by September.

The programmes proposed for nuclear fission safety and for controlled nuclear fusion are both at early stages of discussion and are unlikely to be adopted before the autumn. These two programmes have come forward under the provisions of the Euratom treaty and therefore are not subject to the Community's co-operation procedure.

The third framework programme was originally intended to be implemented in the years 1990-94, inclusive. To date, however, none of the individual programmes has been formally adopted, and no funds from the third framework programme have yet become available.

Kuwait Oil Fires

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what help he has given to *(a)* Kuwaiti British Fire Group, *(b)* Wimpey, *(c)* Taylor Woodrow, and *(d)* Amec to tackle well fires in Kuwait.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to him and my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 7 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *374*. Commercial negotiations are continuing between the Kuwaiti British Fire Group, the joint venture between Amec, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey, and the Kuwaiti authorities. I stand ready to give the group further assistance as necessary.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many uncapped oil well fires there are in proximity to Ahmadi.

Mr. Wakeham: The only information available applies to the current position in Kuwait as a whole, which is that of the order of 500 uncapped wells remain, many of which are still on fire. Reports from Kuwait suggest that around 96 wells have been capped to date.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what well-kill teams are available to the Government of Kuwait.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that there are four firefighting teams working in Kuwait on the well-kill programme for the Kuwait oil company. These teams are all from north America.

The Kuwait authorities are having discussions with a number of other groups of companies which include some from the United Kingdom, offering their services for these operations. On my recent visit to Kuwait I was accompanied by a number of British company representatives among whom were members of the Kuwaiti British Fire Group.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what well records are available to the oil teams in relation to Kuwait.

Mr. Wakeham: Most well records were destroyed by the Iraqi forces during their occupation of Kuwait. I understand that those which remain intact have been made available to the fire-fighting teams.

Offshore Fixed Capital

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the total value of fixed capital offshore in 1990.

Mr. Moynihan: Total capital investment in offshore oil and gas fields up to 1990 amounts to some £74 billion at today's prices.

SCOTLAND

Dental Service

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children have been treated by Greater Glasgow health board's community dental service between 1 October 1990 and 31 March 1991; and of them how many are *(a)* pre-school children, *(b)* school children and *(c)* handicapped children.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not centrally available in the form requested. However, the number of courses of treatment to children by the Greater Glasgow health board community dental service between 1 October 1990 and 31 December 1990 is set out in the table.

Category of Child	*Number of courses of treatment*[1] *1 October 1990 to 31 December 1991*
All Children of which:	5,667
pre-school[2]	1,071
school[2]	4,341
handicapped[3]	167

[1] A child may have more than one course of treatment in the same period.
[2] Excludes handicapped children.
[3] Handicapped (physical or mental) people aged under 16 years.

Seed Potatoes

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to change the certification arrangements for Scottish seed potatoes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984, which govern the classification and marketing of seed potatoes in Great Britain, will shortly be amended to reflect EC requirements that all seed potatoes should be officially inspected prior to marketing. The seed potato classification scheme is kept under continuous review and changes to improve procedures are made as appropriate.

European Funds

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing inward investment received by *(a)* Scottish Office departments, *(b)* regional councils and *(c)* district councils from the (i) European regional development fund and (ii) the European social fund in each year since 1984; what proportion of this finance was additional to planned public expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to develop initiatives to reduce the levels of unemployment within Renfrew district.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Renfrewshire Enterprise Company, under contract to Scottish Enterprise, has a budget of £28·834 million including training allowances in 1991-92 to devote to economic development, training and environmental improvement in its area. Action to reduce levels of unemployment will also be taken by the Employment Service, alongside the local enterprise company.

Disabled People (Training)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve vocational and non-vocational training for people with disabilities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Our policies for community care and for improving vocational education and training for employment are all designed to address the needs of people with disabilities. The arrangements for community care, which will come fully into effect in 1993, include the assessment of individual needs which includes the provision of education and training opportunities for disabled people. Local enterprise companies are responsible for meeting the Government guarantee that all young people aged 16 and 17 years, including those with disabilities, who are not in employment or full-time education should receive an offer of a place on youth training. They are also responsible for meeting the Government's guarantee of a place on employment training for people aged 18 to 24 years who have been unemployed for six to 12 months and the Government's aim to give places on employment training to disabled people as a priority. Furthermore, on 21 March 1991 my right hon. Friend announced the Government's intention to transfer the funding of further education colleges to central Government in 1993, the benefits of which we expect to be shared by people with disabilities.

Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing all expenditure by the Scottish Office in each area of priority treatment in Strathclyde region for each year since 1984 in terms of *(a)* total investment and *(b)* expenditure on a per capita basis for each area of priority treatment.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Records showing the division of all Scottish Office expenditure between areas of priority treatment are not maintained. The information could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Infant Formulae

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been given to maternity units in Scotland regarding offers from manufacturers of free samples or supplies of milk powder or other infant formulæ.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Current guidance to health boards is that free samples or subsidised supplies of breastmilk substitutes should not be accepted from manufacturers for distribution to patients in maternity wards. Boards are also advised to avoid accepting anything of commercial value from manufacturers or distributors which may be seen as influencing their choice or use of infant formulae. These guidelines, implemented with the agreement of the manufacturers of baby milks, are part of the Government's response to the World Health Organisation's programme to promote and protect breastfeeding.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairmen of the local enterprise companies in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend meets local enterprise company chairmen from time to time, as do I and my colleagues. The fact that all local enterprise companies in Scotland are now operational is a considerable achievement, due in no small measure to the commitment of the chairmen and their fellow board members.

Scottish Council for Spastics

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Council for Spastics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have not met representatives of the Scottish Council for Spastics. I did, however, visit Stanmore House school in September 1988 and opened a new unit for handicapped children at Westerlea school in June 1989. Both schools are run by the council. I maintain regular contact with the council through my Department's representatives on the council's professional advisory committee and fully recognise the valuable services which the council provides.

Further Education

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had during the last six months on the provision of further education in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend and I have met college principals, college council chairmen and the chairman of the Scottish Vocational Education Council over the last six months. We will shortly be publishing a White Paper setting out our policies on the future of further education colleges and comments will be invited.

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the counselling arrangements established for those tenants who have applied to join the Government's rents-to-mortgages scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Counselling on the Scottish Homes' pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme is available on request from Scottish Homes. Those who express an interest in purchasing their home through the rent-to-mortgage scheme are given full details of the financial implications and of alternative courses of action such as purchasing under the right-to-buy scheme. The precise arrangements are a matter for Scottish Homes.

Homelessness

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the current total figures for 1991 are for *(a)* homeless persons on a regional basis, *(b)* the number of people on each housing waiting list, by district and *(c)* the number of district council/island authority houses left unlet for three months or more, in each authority area in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of applicants under the homeless persons legislation assessed by local authorities as homeless as recorded in the returns submitted to the Scottish Office in the year ended 31 March 1990 are set out in the table. Comparable figures for 1991 are not yet available. Reliable information on the number of people on housing waiting lists is not held centrally. Local authority returns on their vacant stock do not identify those unlet for three months or more. The available information, which relates to dwellings available for letting which had been vacant for four months or more at 31 March 1990, was published in table 15 of "Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin HSU No 17". Copies were sent to all Members representing Scottish constituencies and are available in the House Library.

Applicant households under the homeless persons legislation assessed as homeless, by region, 1989-90

	Number
Borders	114
Central[1]	2,096
Dumfries and Galloway	465
Fife	2,017
Grampian	2,653
Highland	525
Lothian	4,367
Strathclyde[1]	14,310
Tayside	1,584
Orkney Islands	14
Shetland Islands	109
Western Isles	58

[1] Some returns are known to be outstanding.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of people who are registered as disabled in Scotland, in the format most convenient to his Department;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the number of people who are registered as disabled in each local authority area in Scotland;

(3) if he will publish a table showing the number of adults with *(a)* mental handicap, *(b)* mental illness and *(c)* physical handicap for each local authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of people in particular categories of disability is not collected centrally. Scottish local authorities are required to inform themselves of the numbers of chronically sick and disabled people within their areas but they are not required to keep registers of disabled people.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the funds awarded to local enterprise companies in Scotland has been specifically targeted to enhance the unit price of training for people with disabilities and learning difficulties; and if he will give an analysis of where any extra expenditure has been distributed by each LEC.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The funding of local enterprise companies for youth training is separate from the funding of adult training but beyond this there is no specific targeting of funds to particular groups within the main programmes. Decisions about unit prices paid to training providers are a matter for local enterprise companies.

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount of land owned by the Forestry Commission on a county-by-county basis in *(a)* January 1981 and *(b)* January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 March, at column *278*.

Legal Aid

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the net amount of legal aid paid in respect of divorce and related matters in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The following figures are based on the costs of civil legal aid for divorce, separation, aliment and husband and wife miscellaneous, and of civil legal advice and assistance for family/matrimonial cases, all net of estimated income from contributions and expenses.

Year	*£'000*
1981-82	6,014
1982-83	7,485
1983-84	9,482

Year	£'000
1984-85	7,627
1985-86	9,584
1986-87	10,894
1987-88	10,995
1988-89	10,807
1989-90	9,533
1990-91	10,732

Youth Training

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table of Highlands and Islands Enterprise activitiy estimates for 1991-92 in comparison with HIDB/Training Agency activity estimates for 1990-91 in respect of youth training and adult training, in similar form to the figures published in table 3:7 of "Serving Scotland's Needs" for the Scottish Enterprise area.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 May 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Member.

Hospital Security

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to investigate security arrangements at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* Security arrangements at the Royal Alexandra hospital are a matter for Argyll and Clyde health board who have been asked for a report on the situation.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines the Scottish Office has issued regarding security in hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* Security arrangements in hospitals are the responsibility of local managers. To assist them in the difficult task of providing proper security arrangements, the National Association of Health Authorities published a security manual in 1984. The manual includes practical guidance on the development of a security policy, appointment of security staff, the security of patients, staff and property, the prevention of trespass and intruder detection. It has been commended to health boards by my Department. It is being revised and copies will be re-issued later this year.

Health boards were reminded in November 1990 of the need to keep their security arrangements under review and were encouraged to establish hospital watch schemes.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the actual strength of the Territorial Army in each year since 1978.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Full details for years prior to 1982 are not recorded centrally and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost. The relevant data for the years 1982 to 1990 are given in the table.

Year	Establishment	Strength	
		Numbers	Percentage of establishment
1982	75,000	70,500	94
1983	75,000	70,300	94
1984	75,100	68,800	92
1985	77,200	70,500	91
1986	80,200	73,900	92
1987	84,400	74,600	88
1988	85,300	71,800	84
1989	85,300	71,300	84
1990	85,600	70,600	82

Note: Figures exclude the Home Service Force.

The Gulf (Reserve Forces)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of the armed forces, other than regulars, served in the Gulf campaign, distinguishing between the various categories of reserves in which they served; to what extent they were employed in medical units; and, for Army personnel, what were the corps or regiments in which they served.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The figures given in the following tables show reserve personnel called out for service with the armed forces during Operation Granby, including those who served in the Gulf area and in the United Kingdom and Germany.

The Royal Navy called out a total of 414 personnel, no more than 399 of whom were embodied at any one time, as follows:

Trade	Royal Fleet Reserve	Royal Naval Reserve	Total at any one time
Supply and secretariat	34	Nil	34
Cook	4	Nil	4
Radar	70	Nil	70
Diver	8	Nil	8
Communications	81	Nil	81
Electronic warfare	32	Nil	32
Medical	11	Nil	11
Weapons engineering	48	Nil	48
Mechanical engineering	107	Nil	107
Public affairs branch officers	Nil	[1]19	4
	395	[1]19	399

[1] Of the 19 public affairs branch officers no more than four were embodied at any one time.

The 11 RFR medical personnel were deployed to the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar.

The Army called out 1,075 reservists, as follows:

Corps	Members of Territorial Army	Individual Reservists	Total
Royal Army Medical Corps	529	493	1,022
Royal Military Police	39	nil	39
Intelligence Corps	4	9	13
Royal Artillery	nil	1	1
Total	572	503	1,705

Reservists of the Royal Army Medical Corps were deployed to medical units. The majority, 977, were deployed to the Gulf, with the balance, 45, serving in Germany and the United Kingdom.

The Royal Air Force called out a total of 286 personnel although no more than 278 were serving at any one time. The breakdown is as follows:

Squadron/Flight	*Royal Auxiliary Air Force*	*Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve*	*Total at any one time*
No. 4626 Aeromedical Squadron	125	nil	125
No. 4624 Movements Squadron	127	nil	127
No. 7644 Flight, Public Relations Flight	nil	[1]11	[1]3
No. 7006 Flight, Intelligence Flight	nil	17	17
Mobile Meteorological Unit	nil	[2]6	6
Total	252	34	278

[1]Public Relations personnel were called out on a rotational basis. A maximum of 3 were embodied at any one time.
[2]Meteorological Officers held Civilian Component commissions in either the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve of Officers or the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

No. 4626 Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron comprises doctors, nurses, medical assistants and support staff who were deployed to medical units in the Gulf and the United Kingdom.

Hare Coursing

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many licences have been issued to allow hare coursing to take place on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 March 1991 at column *331*.

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are in the region of Ahmadi in Kuwait; from what regiments they are drawn; who is responsible for monitoring their health; what provisions have been made to limit their period of exposure to air pollution arising from oil fires; and when they are expected to return to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the British Army medical team working out of the Ahmadi hospital.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently some 30 medical personnel from the Royal Army Medical Corps and the RAF at Ahmadi hospital. There are also six patients from the battle group in the hospital. The medical personnel form the British medical support team, which provides surgical cover for the battle group. They are responsible for monitoring the health of the members of the battle group as well as their own. When the battle group withdraws, the medical team will remain in Kuwait to provide medical support to members of 21 Explosive Ordnance Disposal—EOD—Squadron. Face masks are available to these personnel and they are advised to avoid strenuous activity when in areas suffering heavy air pollution. The present members of the medical support team have only recently arrived in Kuwait; current plans envisage their withdrawal, with 21 EOD Squadron, within the next four months.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to inquire into the circumstances in which British soldiers in the Gulf were killed by fire from an allied aircraft; when he expects the inquiry to be concluded; and whether the conclusions will be published.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The British military investigation into the incident in which nine British soldiers were killed by fire from United States A10 aircraft on 26 February is being urgently pursued but has not yet been completed. Its findings will be discussed with the United States Administration to resolve any areas of uncertainty. The next of kin and Parliament will then be given as full an account of the outcome of the investigation as is possible.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long he expects that the British battle group will remain in Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) on 27 March at column *482*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to station United Kingdom forces in Dahuk.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Kurdish refugees have expressed concern at the security environment in Dahuk. The need for United Kingdom or other joint forces in Dahuk will be kept under review in the light of developments.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of military personnel for Royal Ordnance in Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following the liberation of Kuwait, British forces in Kuwait provided emergency assistance to the Kuwaiti Government in clearing mines and other ordnance. In the longer term this work will be carried on and completed by civilian contractors, including Royal Ordnance plc. 21 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron, Royal Engineers will be deployed to Kuwait to provide specialist advice and assistance for a limited transitional period which will enable Royal Ordnance and the subcontractors to get established. Military personnel may carry out search, location, identification and recording/surveying of unexploded ordnance, booby traps and mines. They will not be employed directly on clearance of minefields nor on the disposal of other explosive devices. The unit will, at all times, remain under direct military control and the commanding officer will have the right to refuse tasks if, in his professional judgment, he believes they might involve risk greater than would be involved during normal peacetime work and training. Royal Ordnance will meet the full costs of the deployment.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of submarines in the Arabian Gulf during the conflict with Iraq.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Although it is not the normal practice of the Ministry of Defence to comment on the details of submarine operations, I can confirm that HMS Otus and HMS Opossum were deployed in support of Operation Granby.

Research and Development

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the figures for defence research and development expenditures from public funds as a proportion of all such publicly funded outlays by central Government in each of the years 1963-64, 1969-70, 1973-74, 1978-79 and 1979-80.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Government-funded defence research and development expenditures as a percentage of all Government-funded research and development are as follows:

	Per cent.
1969-70	43
1973-74	42
1978-79	49
1979-80	50

Data for 1963-64 are not available.

Sirsensk Air Base

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action United Kingdom/United States forces are taking to extend the air base at Sirsensk.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: United Kingdom forces deployed in Turkey and northern Iraq are currently being supported by helicopters based in Turkey, principally at Silopi. The requirement for forward operating bases will be kept under review in the light of developments; Sirsensk is a possibility.

Kuwait Oil Fires

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records are kept of all personnel involved in countering Kuwait oil fires; and whether he will make it his policy that they will be made available to civil lawyers in any future cases relative to health and safety.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No military personnel are involved in countering Kuwait oil fires.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what logistical support he is giving to capping and extinguishing oil wells in Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on 30 April, *Official Report*, column *150*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Strangford Schools

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there are at each primary and secondary school in the constituency of Strangford in the present academic year.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not yet available. However, I have arranged for it to be sent to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as it is available.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland will carry out an epidemiological survey into the incidence of myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans at present to carry out such a survey, but it should be added that myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME—is recognised by the Government and the health service as a debilitating and distressing condition but it is not yet a clearly defined disease.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 May 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis he calculated community charge for two adults at £901 in Lambeth in the illustrative tables published with his consultation paper in the council tax.

Mr. Key: The community charge for two adults is two times the personal community charge set for the area, after allowing for the £140 reduction announced in the Budget. The final amount set will be less to the extent that reductions are secured by capping. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce his decisions on capping as soon as possible.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the council tax payable for two people in a property valued at less than £26,800 as a proportion of the council tax payable by *(a)* two-person household in the central band and *(b)* in a household in the central band as a proportion of the council tax payable by a two-person household in the top band, (i) overall and (ii) in Grimsby.

Mr. Key: Under our proposals, in every area the council tax for a property with two adults valued at less than £26,800 would be two thirds of the bill for a property in the central band; and the bill for a property in the highest band would be two thirds more than the bill for a property in the central band.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will provide estimates of the numbers of tax units gaining and losing, and the amounts of their losses and gains, in pounds per week and as a percentage of net income (1) in the move from domestic rates to community charge, (2) in the move from community charge to council tax but retaining maximum rebates of 80 per cent. for council tax and (3) in the move from community charge to council tax, but with 100 per cent. rebates for council tax differentiating between single-pensioner tax units, one-parent family tax units, other single-adult tax units, tax unit couples with *(a)* no children, *(b)* one child, *(c)* two children and *(d)* three or more children, and all tax units;

(2) if he will provide estimates of the number of households gaining and losing, and the amounts of their losses and gains, in pounds per week and as a percentage of net income (1) in the move from domestic rates to community charge, (2) in the move from community charge to council tax but retaining maximum rebates of 80 per cent. for council tax and (3) in the move from community charge to council tax, but with 100 per cent. rebates for council tax differentiating between single pensioner households, other single-adult households, two-adult households, households of three or more adults and all households.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report*, on the same basis as his illustrative 1991-92 council tax exemplifications, for each authority the average amount per household (1) paid in community charge in 1991-92, (2) which would have been paid in council tax in 1991-92, (3) which would have been paid in community charge in 1991-92 for spending at standard spending assessment and (4) which would have been paid in council tax in 1991-92 for spending at standard spending assessment.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 April 1991 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), at column *12*.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to a 14-band property tax as a means of financing local government.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* None.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay his decision to make a de minimis provision of £10,000 in his statement of 3 April on charge-capping; and if he will list the local authorities that would have been designated for capping had this provision not been included.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Five authorities set budgets which exceeded the provisional criteria announced on 31 October 1990 by less than £10,000. In each case the maximum reduction in community charge bills secured by capping would have been less than 10p. The five authorities are: Brighton, Buckinghamshire, Enfield, Hammersmith and Fulham and the West Midlands police authority.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish his best estimates of the total amount of poll tax income that local authorities have been unable to collect in the financial year 1990-91;

(2) what are his best estimates of unpaid non-domestic taxes at the end of the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* On the basis of the returns received so far, we estimate that by 31 March 1991 local authorities in England had collected £8·6 billion in non-domestic rates, equivalent to 94 per cent. of the provisional contribution to the non-domestic rates pool.

On the basis of the same returns, we also estimate that by 31 March 1991 local authorities in England had collected £9·4 billion in community charges, equivalent to 92 per cent. of the community charge income which they budgeted to receive.

My Department does not yet have information about the amounts of non-domestic rates or community charges collectable by authorities and therefore about the amounts of rates or community charges outstanding.

British Waterways (Property Auction)

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will arrange for a copy of the catalogue produced for the recent property auction held by British Waterways to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Trippier: This has been arranged.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proceeds were raised by the recent auction sale of property by British Waterways.

Mr. Trippier: The auction held on 27 March 1991 raised £2·9 million. Some of the properties originally included in the catalogue were sold separately and raised an additional £0·7 million.

British Waterways

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his most recent estimate of the cost of the backlog of maintenance that needs to be carried out by British Waterways.

Mr. Trippier: The British Waterways board's latest estimate of the arrears of maintenance which need to be dealt with during the next five years is £47 million at 1990-91 prices. This figure does not include the cost of strengthening public road bridges under Operation Bridgeguard.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any adjustments have been made to the grant to British Waterways or its external finance limit in the wake of its recent sale of assets.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any adjustments have been made to the grant to British Waterways or its external finance limit in the wake of the recent slump in the property market.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Red Squirrels

81. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for the conservation of the red squirrel.

Mr. Trippier: The red squirrel is fully protected against killing, injuring, taking and selling through its listing on schedule 5 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Housing Valuations

82. **Mr. Gould:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the estimates available to his Department of the percentage of housing stock in each local authority in England falling into the valuation bands *(a)* £0-£15,000, *(b)* £15,001-£30,000, *(c)* £30,001-£45,000, *(d)* £45,001-£60,000, *(e)* £60,001-£80,000, *(f)* £80,001-£100,000, *(g)* £100,001-£125,000, *(h)* £125,001-£150,000, *(i)* £150,001-£175,000, *(j)* £175,001-£200,000, (k) £200,001-£250,000, *(l)* £250,001-£300,000, *(m)* £300,001-£500,000 and *(n)* £500,001 plus.

Mr. Portillo: No. The Government published a range of data underlying their consultative paper "A New Tax for Local Government" on 23 April 1991.

Council Tax

84. **Mr. Gould:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will rework his published estimates of council tax on the basis of the valuation bands sought by the Valuation Office in circular VO53 and subsequently provided to his Department.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the background material used in preparation of his council tax exemplifications published on 23 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 April 1991 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), at column *12*.

Building Regulations (Fire Safety)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to harmonise the building regulations fire safety requirements in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland and Northern Ireland; what representations he has received from fire officers on the operation of the current requirements in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The current review of the building regulations aims to achieve a greater degree of technical consistency between the provisions for England and Wales, and the requirements for Scotland and Northern Ireland. Thirty-six fire authorities made representations about the operation of the current requirements in the course of a study commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry, in conjunction with the Home Office and my Department last year.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on his efforts to secure international agreement on the environmental safety of genetically modified organisms.

Mr. Trippier: Further to my right hon. Friend's statement on 29 January, my Department made a contribution of $80,000—£44,700—to the secretariat of the United Nations conference on environment and development—UNCED—on 18 April. The secretariat will spend this money on mounting a conference, to be held in London between 17 and 18 June, at which representative international experts will be consulted on the development of guidelines on the risk assessment and management worldwide of activities involving genetically modified organisms. This work will inform consideration of the environmentally sound management of biotechnology, which is a priority topic for UNCED, to be held in Brazil in 1992.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether Ordnance Survey is being examined as a candidate for privatisation;

(2) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Ordnance Survey; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the chief executive of the Ordnance Survey to write to the hon. Member with the details he requested.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Historic Royal Palaces Agency; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Sir George Young: The chief executive of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency will write to the hon. Member with the information he requests. I will arrange for copies of the letter to be placed in the Library of this House.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Sir George Young: I have asked the chief executive of the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre to write to the hon. Member with the details he requested.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Building Research Establishment; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Sir George Young: I have asked the chief executive of the Building Research Establishment to write to the hon. Member with the details he requested.

National Environment Week

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department will be making towards National Environment Week.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 May 1991 to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), at column *831*.

Waveney District Council

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement listing the amount of public money his Department has passed to Waveney district council for all services in each of the past 10 years; and what his plans are for the next three years.

Mr. Key: The amounts paid in support of Waveney district council's general services for these years were:

	Rate support grant (£000)	*Main housing subsidy (£000)*
1981-82	4,063	853
1982-83	4,176	77
1983-84	4,246	0
1984-85	4,291	0
1985-86	4,239	131
1986-87	4,533	0
1987-88	4,606	0
1988-89	4,721	0
1989-90	4,946	0

The amount paid to Waveney district council's collection fund, on which Suffolk county council precepts, in respect of 1990-91 were:

	1990-91 (£000)
Revenue support grant	11,894
Non-domestic rates	23,966
Housing revenue account subsidy	3,772

The amounts that the Government propose to pay to the district council's collection fund in respect of 1991-92 are:

	(£000)
Community charge grant	[1]11,285
Revenue support grant	11,298
National non-domestic rates	28,552
Housing revenue account subsidy	3,582

[1] Estimated.

These figures exclude information on minor specific grants paid in respect of particular functions or services.

It is not possible to give details of the amounts of external finance to be paid to the district council in 1992-93 and 1993-94 since this will depend on decisions which have yet to be taken on the amount and distribution of public expenditure in those years.

Rural Housing

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grants under the rural housing programme have been made in the south-west region; and how many home improvement agencies have been aided.

Mr. Yeo: A total of £7·9 million of supplementary credit approvals will be issued to local authorities for 1991-92 in respect of schemes under the rural housing programme. A schedule of allocations has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Five home improvement agency schemes in the south-west region have been aided for the same period.

Pollution Taxes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the report on pollution taxes prepared by the state university of Leiden in the Netherlands for the environment directorate of the European Commission.

Mr. Trippier: This report has not yet been released by the Commission, nor have the views of member states' Governments been sought.

"This Common Inheritance"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in implementing paragraph 18.31 of Cm. 1200, with regard to the establishment of a new discussion and advisory body with members drawn from a wide spectrum of business interests.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 7 May the appointment of the members of a new Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment. The committee is to be chaired by John Collins, chairman and chief executive of Shell UK Ltd. The other committee members are as listed.

The committee is intended to have three central roles: to provide for a strategic level dialogue between Government and business on environmental issues, both of an immediate and topical interest and of a longer-term nature; in liaison with other appropriate organisations, to help mobilise the business community in demonstrating good environmental practice and management, building on existing initiatives and activities, and to provide a link with, and focus attention on, international business initiatives on the environment.

Advisory committee on business and the environment

Name	*Position*	*Company*
John Collins (Chairman)	Chairman and Chief Executive	Shell UK Ltd.
A. B. Cleaver	Chairman and Chief Executive	IBM UK Ltd.
Chris Hampson	Director	ICI
John G. Speirs	Managing Director	Norsk Hydro (UK) Ltd.
David Lyon	Chief Executive	Bowater plc.
Rod Aspinwall	Chairman	Aspinwall and Company
Robert Jones	Coordinator, Conservation Projects	British Gas
Nicholas Hood CBE	Chairman	Wessex Water plc.
Robin Paul	Managing Director	Albright and Wilson
John Baker	Chief Executive	National Power
P. J. Costain	Group Chief Executive	Costain Group plc.
Dorothy MacKenzie	Chief Executive	Dragon International
R. D. Yeomans	Managing Director	Wincanton Group Ltd.
Christopher G. F. Harding	Chairman	British Nuclear Fuels plc.
Derek Wanless	Chief Executive, UK Financial Services	National Westminster Group plc
Norman Adsetts	Chairman	Sheffield Insulations Group plc.
Peter A. M. Heath	Chairman and Chief Executive	Cleanaway
A. P. Bird	Managing Director	Bird Group of Companies
Cameron McLatchie	Chairman and Chief Executive	British Polythene Industries plc.
Nigel Palmer	Chief Executive	C. W. Pittard and Co.
Paul J. E. Rink	Joint Managing Director	Wolstenholme Rink plc.
George Simpson	Chief Executive	Rover Group
Sue Green	Group Communications Director	Legal and General Group plc.
D. J. Challen	Director	J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co. Ltd.

The Gulf (Oil Pollution)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance has been offered by the United Kingdom to the Governments of Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to protect migrating pipers, plovers, redshanks and other birds from oil pollution in the Gulf during their return to the northern hemisphere this spring.

Mr. Trippier: The International Council for Bird Preservation, which is based in Cambridge, is currently undertaking, with the support of the Saudi national commission for wildlife conservation and development, a detailed study of the spring migration in the Gulf. This work, which involves ringing and colour marking of birds, will give an indication of how seriously migrating species are likely to be affected by pollution in the Gulf. My Department proposes to contribute £10,000 to the cost of this study which should be completed next month.

Water Supplies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current status of United Kingdom water supplies and their adequacy to supply the demands of the next decade.

Mr. Trippier: We are informed that water resources are satisfactory and water undertakers expect to maintain normal supplies—except in parts of the south east and east of England. In these areas, groundwater levels are well below normal but water companies expect to maintain supplies with restrictions confined to less-essential uses. The position to 2011 is set out in the National Rivers Authority's report "Demands and Resources of Water Undertakers in England and Wales", copies of which are held in the Library.

Environmental Business Opportunities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of his Shell lecture on environmental business opportunities given at the Royal Society of Arts on 7 May.

Mr. Trippier: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the Shell lecture "The Environment Business" which my right hon. Friend delivered on 7 May.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report*, columns *273-74*, to the hon. Member for Hendon,

North (Mr. Gorst) concerning planning appeals, how many of the appeals allowed, following a local authority decision to refuse planning permission, concerned cases in areas with current and properly constituted local plans approved by him.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available.

Sulphur Dioxide

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy with respect to the abatement of emissions of sulphur dioxide.

Mr. Trippier: The Government's policies for the abatement of air pollution were explained in chapter 11 of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance". The United Kingdom is committed, under European Community legislation, to cut emissions of sulphur dioxide from existing power stations and other large combustion plant by 60 per cent. by 2003, compared with 1980 levels. Under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, operators of industrial plant are being required to use best available techniques not entailing excessive cost to reduce harmful emissions, including sulphur dioxide. I am arranging to place in the Library copies of maps which illustrate the expected effects of these policies by 2005. They show that the areas in which our soils and freshwaters are subject to sulphur depositions in excess of "critical loads"—the levels which they can tolerate without adverse effects—should be very substantially reduced by that date: to around 8 per cent. of the United Kingdom surface area in respect of soils and around 4 per cent. of the surface area of Scotland in the case of freshwaters—freshwaters maps are not yet available for the remainder of the United Kingdom.

The maps have been prepared to inform discussions in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which are intended to lead to a new international agreement on sulphur dioxide by November 1992. My Department will also be issuing shortly a brochure to explain the basis of this mapping work.

Local Authority Expenditure (Southampton)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *459*, if he will *(a)* set out the precise basis of his calculation and *(b)* show the increase between 1988-89 and 1991-92 for Southampton district council using budget figures only.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The components used to calculate the increase between 1988-89 and 1990-91 in the table to which the hon. Member refers were as follows:

Expenditure in 1988-89 to compare with demand in 1990-91 was taken from information reported by the authority on form RS1B and comprises:

- Total expenditure 1988-89
- less Parish Precepts
- less Rate Fund Contribution to Housing Revenue Account
- less Rent Rebates
- plus Variation in balances

Demand in 1990-91 was the figure returned by the authority.

Increase in spending levels 1988-89 to 1990-91 comprises:

Demand 1990-91

Expenditure in 1988-89 to compare with demand

Southampton district council's increase in spending from 1988-89 to 1991-92 based on the budget returns is 46 per cent.

Margaret Thatcher House

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will reimburse Southend borough council for the cost of building Margaret Thatcher house.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* It is for local authorities to decide how to finance capital expenditure from the resources available to them. These resources include usable capital receipts, contributions from revenue and borrowing authorised by a credit approval. In the latter case, the capital financing charges are allowed for in revenue support grant.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all Government-owned listed buildings sold into private ownership since 1980, the purchaser and any covenant placed on future usage.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* I regret this information is not readily available and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Heveningham Hall

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now serve listed building repair notices on the owner of Heveningham hall.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* No. I have been advised by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England that the restoration work at Heveningham hall is being carried out to a satisfactory standard.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about the sale and present condition of Heveningham hall; and what response he has made.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Since March of this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has received six letters regarding the sale and present condition of Heveningham hall. All six letters focus on his right of pre-emption in the event of the present owners wishing to sell Heveningham hall or part of it within 21 years from the date of the conveyance—November 1981. However, there is no reason to believe that the present owners will wish to sell the property in the foreseeable future. The owner's agents, Gulf Park Property management Ltd. have advised that the Al Ghazzi family intend to go on using the hall. This information has been passed on to the authors of the letters. In addition, two of the letters mention the poor condition of the gardens and car park and criticise the quality of interior furnishings. We have explained to the authors that these are subjective matters which do not affect the integrity of the property as a listed building. I understand that good progress is being made with the restoration of the building itself.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to serve a compulsory purchase order on Heveningham hall.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* No. There is no case for serving a compulsory purchase order on Heveningham hall.

Listed Buildings (Owners)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require that the name of the ultimate beneficial owner of a listed building is recorded with the address and category of listing of the building.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* No.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to establish the local government commission before the start of the summer recess.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Our proposals for a new local government commission are set out in our consultation paper on the structure of local government in England published on 23 April. We have no plans to establish the commission before the summer recess.

HOME DEPARTMENT

House Burglaries, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the figures for house burglaries in the areas served by the police stations at *(a)* Retford, *(b)* Southwell and *(c)* Newark in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1990.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not collected centrally for the areas requested.

Marine Distress Rockets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of South Yorkshire indicating what inquiries have been instigated into the original ownership of the 20 marine distress rockets found by a builder in Station road, Keadby, near Doncaster, Yorkshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable of South Yorkshire that the rockets appear to have been buried for some time, and no inquiries into their original ownership are envisaged.

Postal and Proxy Voting

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he intends to spend in the lead-up to the next general election on promoting the use of postal and proxy voting among *(a)* the sick and disabled and *(b)* those whose occupation means that they are unable to vote in person.

Mrs. Rumbold: When the next general election is announced, we plan to run an advertising campaign to inform all electors of their right to an absent vote if they are unable to get to their polling stations to vote in person. The campaign will have a budget of £665,000.

Police Manpower, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of police attached to the police stations at *(a)* Retford, *(b)* Southwell and *(c)* Newark in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that no reliable manpower figures for 1979 can be provided because of changes which have occurred to sub-divisional and section boundaries. The figures for December 1990 are given in the table:

Area	*Police manpower*	*Civilians*
Retford	40	3
Southwell	15	2
Newark	76	15

Passport Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the United Kingdom passport agency is being examined as a candidate for privatisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the United Kingdom passport agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This has been passed to the chief executive of the passport agency who will be replying shortly. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Forensic Science Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the forensic science service; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This has been passed to the director general of the forensic science service, who will be replying shortly. A copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Home Office Spending (Suffolk)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement listing his Department's contribution to police, prisons, fire and other services within Suffolk for each of the past 10 years; and what his forward plans are for the next three years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Home Office pays specific grant on a proportion of local authorities' expenditure on police, magistrates' courts, probation and civil defence. The proportion varies according to the service. My Department also pays grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 to enable local authorities to employ additional staff to meet the specific needs of local communities of Commonwealth origin. Details of some of these grants to individual authorities are not available for all of the last 10 years. The available information, and that on Home Office expenditure on prisons, in respect of

Suffolk is given in the table. No detailed forecasts are made of grant and other payments to individual local authorities for future years.

	Police[1] £'000s	Magistrates' courts[2] £'000s	Probation[3] £'000s	Civil defence[4] £'000s	Section 11[5] £'000s	Prisons[6] £'000s
1981-82	9,934	—	—	—	29	—
1982-83	10,901	—	935	—	57	—
1983-84	11,613	—	1,029	—	88	18,932
1984-85	12,411	1,184	1,102	—	82	19,331
1985-86	13,687	1,301	1,205	223	113	19,924
1986-87	14,776	1,448	1,329	241	109	20,629
1987-88	15,701	1,563	1,461	286	113	23,164
1988-89	17,805	1,997	1,568	356	119	22,481
1989-90	20,458	2,485	1,939	367	150	23,860
[7]1990-91	22,291	2,707	2,035	362	148	26,263
[7]1991-92	24,772	2,933	2,298	324	173	28,101

[1] Rate of grant—51 per cent.
[2] Rate of grant—80 per cent.
[3] Rate of grant—Mainly 80 per cent.
[4] Rate of grant—Mainly 100 per cent.
[5] Rate of grant—75 per cent.
[6] Operating costs of the three prison establishments in Suffolk.
[7] Estimates of grant and expenditure.

The Home Office makes no specific contribution to local authorities' expenditure on fire services. Government support for fire is provided through the revenue support grant system, and decisions on fire expenditure are the responsibility of individual local authorities.

Foreign Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many male and female foreign nationals are serving a sentence or are on remand in a prison establishment in England and Wales; and if he will list the countries from which they emanate;

(2) how many males and females convicted or charged with a drug-related offence are currently resident in gaols in England and Wales; and if he will list the countries from which they emanated.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 30 June 1990, the latest date for which information is readily available, an estimated 2,869 male and 303 female sentenced prisoners in prison service establishments in England and Wales were known to be foreign nationals; of these 1,086 males and 162 females had been sentenced for drugs offences. The nationalities of these prisoners are shown in the table. However, the recording of nationality is not always reliable. Information about nationality is not recorded centrally for the remand population.

Sentenced prisoners on 30 June 1990 who were known to be foreign nationals by sex, nationality and whether sentenced for drugs offences.

Nationality	All offences			Drugs offences		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
India	245	14	259	79	7	86
Pakistan	252	2	254	125	—	125
Other Asian Commonwealth	64	1	65	14	—	14
Nigeria	428	99	527	339	55	394
Ghana	42	18	60	25	13	38
Other African Commonwealth	91	9	100	33	4	37
Jamaica	432	40	472	116	18	134
Other Caribbean Commonwealth	121	15	136	29	9	38
Cyprus	54	2	56	18	2	20
Australia, Canada, New Zealand	38	3	41	9	1	10
Ireland	412	10	422	24	1	25
Other EC countries	196	14	210	87	10	97
United States of America	37	16	53	13	10	23
South America	110	29	139	90	20	110
Other countries	347	31	378	85	12	97
Total known foreign nationals	2,869	303	3,172	1,086	162	1,248

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the latest year available, how many foreign nationals sentenced to a period of imprisonment in a gaols in England and Wales have been granted home leave and temporary accommodation to facilitate visiting arrangements.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals imprisoned in gaols in England and Wales have dependent children with them.

Mrs. Rumbold: On Friday 10 May, there were 12 foreign nationals in prison service establishments in England and Wales who had their babies with them in a mother and baby unit.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration the Parole Board gives in its deliberations to the specific difficulties faced by foreign nationals.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is a fundamental principle of the parole scheme that each case is considered on its merits. As far as possible, the cases of foreign nationals are considered on the same basis as domestic prisoners.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist for visits from relatives, particularly from children, to foreign nationals in gaols in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The arrangements for visits to prisoners —which apply equally to foreign nationals—are set out in standing order 5, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals in gaols in England and Wales have dependants resident in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not available.

Sports Grounds (Safety)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to implement the recommendation of Lord Justice Taylor's final report into the Hillsborough disaster by extending mandatory all-seated accommodation to sports grounds other than football grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 as amended by the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987.

Mr. John Patten: The question whether it may be necessary or appropriate to extend mandatory all-seated accommodation to sports grounds other than football grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 is currently under active consideration, and the subject of consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers and other interested parties.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all sports grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Ground Act 1975 as amended which are *(a)* enclosed grounds and *(b)* not enclosed grounds.

Mr. John Patten: Sports grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 are as follows. No distinction is now made in designating sports grounds between those which are enclosed and and those which are not. The Act used to distinguish between a "sports stadium" and a "sports ground". The term "sports stadium" was used for a sports ground where the accommodation for spectators wholly or substantially surrounds the playing area, whereas the term "sports grounds" was used for any place where sports take place in the open air. The Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 removed this distinction and replaced the term "sports stadium" with "sports ground". Information on which grounds would formerly have been defined as sports grounds or sports stadiums is not kept centrally.

THE SAFETY OF SPORTS GROUNDS (DESIGNATION) ORDERS

Statutory Instrument

1976 No. 1264 31 July 1976
Rugby Union
Twickenham
National Stadium, Cardiff Arms Park

Football
Arsenal
Aston Villa
Birmingham City
Bristol City
Cardiff City
Coventry City
Derby County
Everton
Ipswich Town
Leeds United
Leicester City
Liverpool
Manchester City
Manchester United
Middlesbrough
Newcastle United
Norwich City
Queen's Park Rangers
Stoke City
Sunderland
Tottenham Hotspur
West Bromwich Albion
West Ham United
Wrexham
Wembley Stadium

1977 No. 1323 29 July 1977
Chelsea
Nottingham Forest
Wolverhampton Wanderers

1978 No. 1091 28 July 1978
Bolton Wanderers
Sheffield Wednesday
Southampton

1979 No. 1022 7 August 1979
Brighton and Hove Albion
Bristol Rovers
Burnley
Cambridge United
Charlton Athletic
Crystal Palace
Fulham
Luton Town
Notts County
Oldham Athletic
Orient
Preston North End
Shrewsbury Town
Swansea City
Watford

1980 No. 1021 18 July 1980
Blackburn Rovers
Grimsby Town

1981 No. 949 2 July 1981
Rotherham United
Barnsley

1982 No. 1052 27 July 1983
Carlisle United

1984 No. 962 4 July 1983
Huddersfield Town
Portsmouth

1984 No. 942 3 July 1984
Oxford United

Sheffield United
Wimbledon

1985 No. 1063 11 July 1985
AFC Bournemouth
Aldershot
Blackpool
Bradford City
Brentford
Bury
Chester
Chesterfield
Colchester
Crewe Alexandra
Darlington
Doncaster Rovers
Exeter City
Gillingham
Halifax Town
Hartlepool
Hereford United
Hull City
Lincoln City
Mansfield Town
Millwall
Newport County
Northampton Town
Peterborough United
Plymouth Argyle
Port Vale
Reading
Rochdale
Scunthorpe[1]
Southend
Stockport County
Swindon Town
Tranmere Rovers
Walsall
Wigan Athletic
York City

1985 No. 1064 11 July 1985
Rugby League
Barrow
Batley
Bradford Northern
Castleford
Dewsbury
Featherstone Rovers
Halifax
Huddersfield
Hull
Hull Kingston Rovers
Keighley
Leeds
Leigh
Oldham
St. Helens
Salford
Swinton
Wakefield Trinity
Warrington
Widnes
Wigan
Workington Town

1986 No. 1296 24 July 1986
Other association football, rugby and cricket grounds
Barnet
Bath
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Billingham
Birmingham (Edgbaston)
Blackpool
Boston
Bridgend
Bristol (Rugby)
Camborne
Cardiff (Arms Park)
Chelmsford
Chorley
Cwmbran
Dartford
Ebbw Vale
Exeter
Gateshead (International Stadium)
Gloucester
High Wycombe
Kettering
Leeds
Leicester
Llanelli
London Champion Hill
The Oval
Lords
Manchester (County Ground)
Mitcham
Morecambe
Neath
Newport
Northwich
Nottingham (Trent Bridge)
Nuneaton
Pontypridd
Poole
Port Talbot
Scarborough
Sheffield (Owlerton)
Southall
Southport
Sutton
Swansea
Telford
Worcester
Workington (Borough Park)
Workington (Ellis Ground)
Yeovil (Athletics Ground)
York
Redruth

1987 No. 1689 24 September 1987
Scarborough

1988 No. 1975 11 November 1988
Scunthorpe[1]
Macclesfield

[1]Previous ground designated by S.I. 1985 No. 1063. New ground designated by S.I. 1988 No. 1975.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many orders have been made, and on what dates, under section 15A of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 as amended by the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987; what plans there are to make any further orders; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to make an order under section 15A of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, as amended by the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987, to make mandatory in safety certificates those conditions specified in the original section 2(2) of the 1975 Act.

Mr. John Patten: No orders have yet been made under section 15A of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975. The feasibility and appropriateness of proposing an order under section 15A to make mandatory in safety certificates those conditions specified in the original section 2(2) of the 1975 Act are under active consideration. No other possible orders under section 15A are currently under consideration.

Mr. Liwa Uddin

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he arranged for instructions to be sent to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad for a visa

to be issued to Mr. Liwa Uddin (Ref: TH/14887/89) enabling him to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office exercised its right to apply for leave to appeal to the immigration appeal tribunal against the adjudicator's decision to allow Mr. Uddin's appeal. Although initially refused by the chairman of the tribunal on 28 February, this application is being reconsidered by the appellate authorities as the Home Office's amplified grounds of appeal had not been placed before the chairman when he reached his decision.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have died by their own hands, so far this year, in England and Wales; and if he will list the prisons, whether the prisoners were on remand or sentenced, their age and whether the inquest verdict is known.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twelve prisoners have died at their own hand in England and Wales so far this year. The details requested are set out in the table.

Deaths of prisoners at their own hand in England and Wales in 1990 (to 12 May)

Establishment	*Inmate status*	*Age*	*Inquest verdict*
The Mount	Sentenced	19	Killed himself
Gloucester	Sentenced	42	Killed himself
Norwich	Sentenced	36	Killed himself
Wandsworth	Sentenced	29	Killed himself while the balance of his mind was disturbed and in circumstances aggravated by lack of care
Full Sutton	Sentenced	33	Awaited
Manchester	Unconvicted	22	Awaited
Cardiff	Unconvicted	23	Killed himself
Liverpool	Unconvicted	22	Awaited
Bristol	Sentenced	31	Awaited
Oxford	Unconvicted	29	Awaited
Garth	Sentenced	38	Awaited
Leeds	Unconvicted	31	Awaited

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales are being held in police cells for the latest date available.

Mrs. Rumbold: On Monday 13 May, there were 613 prisoners in police cells in England and Wales.

WALES

Ysgol Pencae, Llandaff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his decision on the proposed Welsh medium primary school, Ysgol Pencae, Highfields, Llandaff.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 26 April 1991 his decision to approve the proposal to establish this school.

Welsh School of Instrument Making

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the representations he has had in respect of the proposed closure of the Welsh school of instrument making at Abertridwr, a branch of the Ystrad Mynach college of further education; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have had six representations. The Welsh school of musical instrument making and repair is to close at the end of this academic year. The decision is one entirely for Mid Glamorgan local education authority which administers the school and for Ystrad Mynach college of further education.

Compulsory Redundancies

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many compulsory redundancies have taken place in Wales during 1989 and 1990 and to date in 1991; and if he will publish figures for each secondary and primary school in Wales as well as the overall figures for each local education authority area.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Figures for all confirmed redundancies in all industries for each county are shown in the table. Separate figures for compulsory redundancies are not available. Comprehensive information on redundancies in individual schools or local education authority areas is not held centrally.

Confirmed redundancies in all industries in Wales by local authority area 1989—March 1991

	1989	*1990*	*To March 1991*
South Glamorgan	825	1,023	222
Mid Glamorgan	2,945	2,842	729
West Glamorgan	1,902	1,760	269
Gwent	2,843	1,710	510
Dyfed	1,306	819	459
Powys	97	92	0
Gwynedd	449	211	99
Clwyd	1,132	1,987	927
Totals	11,499	10,444	3,215

Note: Figures for 1990 and 1991 are provisional.

Cadw

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Cadw; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1991-92 gross budget for Cadw is £13·71 million of which running costs account for 30 per cent. There are also certain minor running costs for Cadw which are funded centrally by my Department.

Education Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children were *(a)* taught outside normal schools and *(b)* given tuition in their parental homes in each local education authority area in Wales in each of the last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information is not available centrally on children educated other than in school.

National Environment Week

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contribution will be made by his Department to National Environment Week.

Mr. David Hunt: National Environment Week is run by the Civic Trust to promote environmental action at the local level. I wholly support this campaign, which is in line with the Government's aims as set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance". My hon. Friend the Minister of State will be participating in an event associated with the Conwy Valley civic society's contribution to National Environment Week on 17 May.

Mr. O. J. Williams

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what capacity Mr. O. J. Williams accompanied him on his visits to Aberystwyth and Fishguard on 8 and 1 May; and on which other official visits he has been accompanied by Mr. O. J. Williams.

Mr. David Hunt: Mr. O. J. Williams has never been a member of my official party, although he has, of course, been in attendance at political engagements. At both Aberystwyth and Fishguard he attended as a guest of the respective hosts and not as a member of my official party.

Gwynedd Health Authority

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give details of the previous experience of all those appointed by Gwynedd health authority as senior managers at salaries in excess of £12,000 during the last 12 months;

(2) if he will give the total number of senior management appointments made by Gwynedd health authority during the last 12 months where the salary levels exceeded £12,000 per annum in all disciplines;

(3) if he will give the total sum allocated by Gwynedd health authority to the salaries of senior managers in the current year; and what were the comparable figures in 1990, 1989 and 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: These are matters for the Gwynedd health authority.

Traffic

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to announce the outcome of the South Wales area and the north east Clwyd traffic studies.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today announced the addition of eight major schemes to the motorway and trunk road programme for Wales as a result of the conclusions of these studies. The schemes are as follows:

Scheme	*Estimated cost at current prices £ million*	*Planned timing*
M4 Relief Motorway around Newport	215	2000
M4 Castleton-Coryton to three-lane dual carriageway	35	2000
A465 Abergavenny to Hirwaun dualling	95	Late 1990s
A550 Deeside Park to Drome Corner widening	16	Mid 1990s
A494 Drome Corner to Ewloe Improvement to three-lane dual carriageway	36	[1]
A494/A55 Ewloe interchange major remodelling	34	[1]
A494 Ewloe-Mold improvement	12	[1]
A55 Ewloe-Northop widening to three-lane dual carriageway	12	[1]

[1] Phased from 1996-97 onwards.

The preferred route for the A550 Deeside park to Drome corner scheme will be announced shortly. For the other schemes consultants will be appointed to carry out feasibility studies and to consider location and design.

In addition the south Wales area traffic study has shown that relief is needed for the A470 between Pontypridd and M4 at Coryton. The alternatives of widening the A470 or building a relief road are not easy and I have decided to appoint consultants to carry out a transportation study to determine whether improving public transport could achieve traffic relief at a lower cost than road improvement.

The south Wales study also indicates that there will be capacity problems on the M4 at Port Talbot early in the next century. My officials will be consulting West Glamorgan county council to determine whether its plans for a local distributor road can offer a solution.

A copy of the summary of the south Wales area traffic study has been placed in the Library of the House. The north-east Clwyd traffic study report is not yet in final form. A summary will be placed in the Library of the House as it is available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to relieve traffic congestion in Newtown, Powys.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today announced the addition of a bypass scheme to the long term trunk road improvement programme. Consultants will be appointed shortly to study the options and develop the scheme.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Land Registry

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Land Registry; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

The Attorney-General: Questions on the day-to-day running of executive agencies are best answered by their chief executives. However, the gross expenditure provision for the Land Registry for 1991-92 is £236,067,000 of which 68·7 per cent. has been allocated to staff costs.

The registry operates a "token" vote, since the whole of its expenditure provision is expected to be fully met by fees paid by applicants.

Inquests (Legal Aid)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Attorney-General whether legal aid will be available to relatives of the deceased at coroners' inquests.

The Attorney-General: Legal aid is available to relatives of deceased at coroners' inquests for advice and assistance under the green form scheme. There are no plans to extend legal aid for representation at inquests.

Law of Defamation

Mr. Lord: To ask the Attorney-General whether he has considered the responses to the consultation papers on the law of defamation in England and Wales.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has given careful consideration to all the views expressed in the responses to the consultation papers. He has been persuaded by the overall response to the first paper, on the availability of the defence of innocent dissemination, that it would be right to allow printers, as well as distributors, to defend libel claims based on defamatory content of which they were not aware and could not reasonably have been expected to be aware. It is, therefore, his intention to provide that the defence of innocent dissemination should be extended to them as soon as a convenient legislative vehicle is available.

The responses to the consultation paper on the death of a party to defamation proceedings have disclosed widely diverging views as to whether or not it would be fairer to allow proceedings to be started or continued in the absence of the party who has died, but the response has not persuaded the Lord Chancellor that the present rule ought to be changed.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Open University

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial support has been given to the Open university in Scotland and its students in each of the past eight years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Grants from the Department are not given specifically to fund the Open university's activities in Scotland, but to support the university's provision in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Open university expenditure is incurred both locally and centrally. It is not possible to determine accurately that portion of the university's centrally incurred costs which relates to its activities in Scotland.

The table shows, in cash terms, the costs incurred by the Open university's regional office in Edinburgh in each of the last eight years. The Edinburgh office co-ordinates Open university activities throughout Scotland and the costs cover the staffing and overhead costs of the office and the university's study centres in Scotland.

Year	*Amount £ million*
1983	0·751
1984	0·776
1985	0·791
1986	0·889
1987	1·000
1988	1·011
1989	1·099
1990	1·205

Education Spending, Suffolk

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement listing the money his Department has invested in education in Suffolk *(a)* on statutory age education and *(b)* post-16 education for each of the last 10 years; and what his plans are for the next three years.

Mr. Fallon: Spending on education in Suffolk is financed by a number of sources, including rates and the community charge, Government revenue support grant and specific grants, and fees and charges for services. Rates, community charge and revenue support grant are made available to fund all of the local authority's services, and are not hypothecated between individual services. Therefore, it is not possible to identify how much of the authority's spending on education is financed by each of these sources.

Grant Allocations

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the total amount in grant allocation for *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland and the percentage change for the period 1986-87 to the year for which most recent figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: The table sets out identifiable general Government expenditure on education and science from 1986-87 to 1989-90, the latest year for which data are available, by territorial area.

Identifiable general government expenditure on education and science by area[1,2]

£ million

	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1986-87			
Education and science	14,838·6	924·6	2,198·4
1987-88			
Education and science	16,234·5	1,018·2	2,386·5
Percentage change on previous year	9·4	10·1	8·6
1988-89			
Education and science	17,396·3	1,083·3	2,604·3
Percentage change on previous year	7·2	6·4	9·1
1989-90			
Education and science	19,153·9	1,168·8	2,825·4
Percentage change on previous year	10·1	7·9	8·5

[1]Source: *Public Expenditure Analyses to 1993-94: Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement* (Cm. 1520), Annex E Tables E2a to E5b.

[2]Items included in general government expenditure but not included within total expenditure on programmes (privatisation proceeds, general government debt interest and other accounting adjustments) are treated as unidentifiable expenditure and are not allocated to territories.

Teacher Schemes

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what central Government funds are allocated for *(a)* the licensed teacher scheme and *(b)* the articled teacher scheme in the current financial year, for 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Fallon: In 1991-92 the Government are supporting expenditure by local education authorities of some £5·5

million on the licensed teacher scheme and £8·0 million on the articled teacher scheme through grants for education support and training—GEST. Grant is paid at a rate of 65 per cent. of expenditure. Funding for the articled teacher scheme is also provided for higher education institutions through the funding councils, but is not separately identified.

The proposals which my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 3 May for GEST programme expenditure in 1992-93 include £10·1 million for the licensed teacher scheme and £11 million for the articled teacher scheme.

No decisions have yet been reached on expenditure in support of the licensed and articled teacher schemes in 1993-94.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to issue a White Paper on higher education; and what its terms of reference will be.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I decline to speculate on such matters.

Teacher Training

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the comparative studies of the effectiveness of different methods of teacher training the Government have commissioned since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: The following studies of the effectiveness of different methods of teacher training have been commissioned by the Department since 1979:

Project title and principal investigator	*Contract period*
A Study of the Structure and Process of Initial Teacher Education within Universities. (Professor G. Bernbaum, University of Leicester).	1979–83
School-Based Training in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). (Professor P. H. Hirst, University of Cambridge).	1983–86
Teacher Education in a Multi-cultural Society: Training the Trainers. (Professor M. Craft, University of Nottingham).	1984–86
Perspectives on the World of Work in Initial Teacher Training. (Professor P. Kelly, University of Southampton).	1984–88
Industry—Education Work in Initial Teacher Education Courses. (Dr. W. A. H. Scott, University of Bath).	1988
Study of Mature Entrants to the Teaching Profession. (Mr. G. F. Adamson, Sunderland Polytechnic).	1990–91
Evaluation of the Licensed Teacher Scheme. (Dr. S. Hegarty, National Foundation for Educational Research).	1990–92
Evaluation of the Articled Teacher Pilot Scheme. (Dr. S. M. Storey, National Foundation for Educational Research).	1991

Articled Teachers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers are currently being trained on the articled teachers scheme.

Mr. Fallon: There are at present 403 students being trained on the articled teachers scheme.

Universities and Colleges (Grants)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list figures for the distribution of grant to each university and college for 1986-87, 1987-88, 1989-90 and the provisional figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 and the percentage change in the period between 1986-87 and the year for which the most recent figures are available.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Universities' income from Exchequer grants for years up to the academic year 1988-89, the latest for which this information is available, is set out in successive annual editions of "University Statistics: Volume Three, Finance" published by the Universities Statistical Record. the main distribution figures for the academic years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 are set out in University Grants Committee circular letter 3/89 and Universities Funding Council circular letters 12/90 and 6/91 respectively. Copies of these documents are in the Library.

Stratford Grant-maintained School

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied that Stratford GM school is meeting the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988 in respect of the curriculum and related matters.

Mr. Eggar: It is the duty of the governing body and headteacher of Stratford school to secure that the relevant provisions of chapter 1 of part 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988 relating to the curriculum are implemented at the school.

ENERGY

Windfarm Developments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many plans for windfarm developments have been shelved following changes in the non-fossil fuel obligation contract terms from 20-year contracts to eight-year contracts.

Mr. Moynihan: No viable projects had to be excluded from contracting under the 1990 Renewables Order because of the limitation on the premium price until 1998. Amongst the projects that succeeded in gaining contracts under that order are five new wind projects.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to remove the 1998 deadline for premium payments for windfarm developments by a scheme to make payments over a fixed period commencing from the commissioning of each windfarm project.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government keep under review whether to seek the Commission's approval to extend the

fossil fuel levy beyond 1998. However, I am confident that the regional electricity companies will be able to offer generators acceptable contracts under the proposed 1991 Renewables Order. My Department's forthcoming renewables review will provide an opportunity to consider the longer-term implications.

Renewable Energy Programmes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many representations he has received concerning the implementation of the first non-fossil fuel obligation order for electricity generation from renewable sources.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend received a number of representations. These were taken into account by my right hon. Friend in deciding to make the next Renewables Order in the autumn of 1991; and by the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd., and the Office of Electricity Regulation in deciding the project selection procedure for that order.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Moynihan: The Secretary of State plans to make the following appointments in 1991 and 1992:

	1991	*1992*
Advisory Council on Research and Development	2	4
Offshore Industry Advisory Board	2	0
Renewable Energy Advisory Committee	2	2
Coal Task Force	2	14

Appointment to these advisory bodies is as a member and carries no title. Members are not paid; and the duration of their appointment varies from one to three years.

Power Lines

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, further to the statement made on his behalf, *Official Report*, 29 April, column 150, he will state the results of past work relating to connections between power lines and health and the nature, purpose, cost and timetable of further work now proceeding in that regard.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Research into whether electromagnetic fields at power frequencies create a hazard to health has been going on worldwide for more than 10 years. Although there have been some claims which link exposure to these fields to the incidence of cancer and other health effects, to date the findings of such research have been inconclusive.

The national or international bodies such as the World Health Organisation, the International Radiation Protection Association, the United States Office of Technology Assessment and the United Kingdom's National Radiological Protection Board have not concluded that these fields are a danger to human health, but recommend a continuation of research.

In the United Kingdom much of the research is funded by the National Grid Company which is spending about £1 million per year for this purpose. Most of the research work is being done by independent laboratories in various universities and a teaching hospital. Current research work is expected to last for several years.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: During 1991-92 there will be some £26 million available under the home energy efficiency scheme for low income households. We and the energy action grants agency are monitoring the initial operation of the scheme closely.

Magnox Reactors

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the proposals of Nuclear Electric to extend the operating lives of its Magnox reactors.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory In his statement to the House on 9 November 1989, Official Report, column 1176 the Secretary of State for Energy stated:

"In the light of their performance to date, it should be possible, subject to the views of the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate, for the lifetime of at least some of the Magnox stations to be extended. The Government will make available funds for any justifiable investment for this purpose."

That remains the Government's policy.

National Parks: Limestone Quarrying

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what undertakings he has received from PowerGen plc that limestone will not be quarried from national parks.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend, when granting his consent for the installation of flue gas desulphurisation plant at PowerGen plc's Ratcliffe-on-Soar 2,000 MW coal-fired power station, included a condition that limestone extracted from a National Park or regional park cannot be used in the operation of the FGD plant. Any future consent which he may grant for the installation of FGD plant using the limestone/gypsum process will include a similar condition.

Electricity Generation (Environmental Research)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to use the Government's share holding in each of the generating companies to ensure that the environmental research programmes currently undertaken by these companies will be maintained at their present level over the next two years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The Government do not intend to use their rights as an ordinary shareholder to intervene in the commercial decisions of National Power or PowerGen.

PowerGen plc

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will propose a senior official from his Department for appointment as a non-executive director of PowerGen plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

North Sea Gas

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his current estimate of the reserve life of British North sea gas fields.

Mr. Moynihan: The reserves in British North sea gas fields at present rates of production are expected to last in excess of 25 years.

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement listing his Department's role and its spending on activities concerned with the North sea gas and oil industry in Suffolk and Norfolk for each of the past 10 years; and what his forward plans are for the next three years.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's Report to Parliament of April this year on the "Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom", also known as the "brown book", is available in the House of Commons Library. I was pleased to be able to record encouragingly high levels of activity. The breakdown of activity affecting Suffolk and Norfolk is not readily available, although, my Department's offshore supplies office has funded research and development projects with five different contractors in Suffolk and Norfolk in the past 10 years. Great Yarmouth is an important supply centre for the southern basin and Bacton is an important gas terminal, both producing economic and employment benefits to the region. Details of producing fields linked by pipeline to Bacton are included in table 11*(b)* of the report.

Boiler Efficiency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the EC directive on boiler efficiency; and what representations he has received from interested parties in the United Kingdom on this draft directive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government support the aim of improving boiler efficiency. However, we have substantial reservations about the draft directive, which, if implemented, would result in wasteful misallocation of resources; several other member states also have reservations and discussions are continuing in the Council. We are pressing for extensive changes to the draft directive, and this line also reflects representations received from several interested parties.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the statement he issued on 1 May in support of nuclear power, he will set out the criteria on which he based his conclusion that nuclear energy remains an important environmental insurance for the future of this planet.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Government policy on nuclear power is set out in the environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" Cm. 1200.

Kuwait (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a summary of the decisions taken during his visit to Kuwait at the end of April.

Mr. Wakeham: My visit to Kuwait emphasised the ability of United Kingdom companies to assist the Kuwaitis with the reconstruction of their energy and related industries. In particular, my group included a number of firms offering expertise to deal with the burning oilwells. One of the main outcomes was to secure the agreement in principle of the Kuwait Oil Company to a proposal from the Kuwaiti British Fire Group—KBFG—a joint venture of AMEC, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey to undertake a damage assessment survey of a number of wells in northern Kuwait. It is hoped that a formal contract will be awarded to KBFG in the near future.

Hinkley Point

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department has begun the review of nuclear power indicated in his decision letter on the Hinkley Point C reactor.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My decison letter on the Hinkley Point C reactor referred to the statement I made to the House on 9 November 1989. In that statement I made clear that the Government will review the prospects of nuclear power in the United Kingdom in 1994. The precise remit of the review will be set nearer the time. The review will be wide ranging and will take account of all relevant factors.

Belvedere Waste Disposal Plant

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received to date about the proposed waste disposal plant in Belvedere.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has directed Cory Environmental Limited to advertise its application for his consent to construct a waste-fired generating station at Belvedere and has allowed a period up to June 1991 in which objections can be made to him. To date, my Department has registered three objections to the application.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

CBI, Staffordshire

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the CBI in north Staffordshire to discuss the state of the local economy.

Mr. Leigh: The Secretary of State last met representatives of the CBI (midlands) during his visit to the region on 30 April 1991, when a wide range of business matters was discussed.

Laboratory of the Government Chemist

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Laboratory of the Government Chemist; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The Laboratory of the Government Chemist budget for 1991-92 was published in estimates on 12 March 1991 and the gross total is £13·612 million. Of this sum the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, earnings-related NI contribution—ERNIC—superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and casual staff, is around 53 per cent. The Laboratory of the Government Chemist is funded on a net running cost basis, so the final expenditure outturn will depend on income generated during the year. This in turn may slightly affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

Patent Office

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Patent Office; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The Patent Office budget for 1991-92 was published on 12 March 1991 and the gross total is £47·085 million. Of this sum the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and casual staff, is around 55 per cent. The Patent Office has, since 1 April 1991, been funded on a net running cost basis and the final expenditure outturn will thus depend on income generated during the year; this in turn may slightly affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

Insolvency Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the insolvency service; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Redwood: The Department's estimates were published on 12 March. Within these the Insolvency Service executive agency has been allocated a budget of £45·1 million. Of this the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime for both permanent and casual staff, is about 65 per cent.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the National Weights and Measures Laboratory; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The Department's estimates were published on 12 March. Within these the National Weights and Measures Laboratory executive agency has been allocated a budget of £1·942 million. Of this, the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime for both permanent and casual staff, is about 52 per cent.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the National Engineering Laboratory; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The Department's Estimates were published on 12 March. Within these the National Engineering Laboratory executive agency has been allocated a budget of £21·119 million. Of this, the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime for both permanent and casual staff, is about 41 per cent.

Radiocommunications Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Radiocommunications Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Redwood: The Radiocommunications Agency budget for 1991-92 was published in estimates on 12 March 1991. The gross total is £30·587 million. Of this sum the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and casual staff is 42 per cent.

The Radiocommunications Agency has, since 1 April 1990, been funded on a net running cost basis and the final expenditure outturn will thus depend on income generated during the year; this in turn may slightly affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

Companies House

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Companies House; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Redwood: Companies House's budget for 1991-92 was published in estimates on 12 March 1991 and the gross total is £35·811 million. Of this sum, the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and casual staff, is around 46 per cent. Companies House is funded on a net running cost basis and the final expenditure outturn will thus depend on income generated during the year; this in turn may slightly affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

National Physical Laboratory

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the National Physical Laboratory; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The National Physical Laboratory expenditure budget for 1991-92 was published in estimates on 12 March 1991 and the gross total is £45·193 million. Of this sum, the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and temporary staff, is 43 per cent. The NPL has, since 1 April 1991, been funded on a net running

cost basis and the final outturn will therefore depend on income generated during the year. This may affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Warren Spring Laboratory; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Leigh: The Warren Spring Laboratory budget for 1991-92 was published in estimates on 12 March 1991 and the gross total is £8·45 million. Of this sum, the proportion allocated to staff costs, defined as salary, ERNIC, superannuation and overtime costs for both permanent and casual staff is around 78 per cent. The Warren Spring Laboratory has, since 1 April 1990, been funded at a net running cost basis and the final expenditure outturn will thus depend on income generated during the year; this in turn may slightly affect the proportion of total expenditure accounted for by staff costs.

National Environment Week

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution will be made by his Department towards National Environment Week.

Mr. Leigh: During National Environment Week my Department will be holding environment seminars for business at Birmingham and Slough in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Department of Energy and Business in the Environment. These seminars are part of a wider regional programme to fulfil the commitment in last autumn's environmental White Paper "This Common Inheritance" to explain developments on environmental regulation and other environmental issues affecting business and to encourage businesses to use help which Government Departments can offer them.

Poland (Pollution Control)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what matters relating to the sale of United Kingdom environmental pollution control to Poland were agreed during the visit of the President of Poland.

Mr. Leigh: The sale of such equipment was not discussed during President Walesa's visit, but my Department will be exploring the opportunities in this sector with the Polish authorities on 23 May at the joint commission talks in Warsaw.

Remote Sensing Satellite

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution Her Majesty's Government have made to the development and use of *(a)* the European remote sensing satellite and *(b)* the along-track scanning radiometer.

Mr. Leigh: The Government have contributed almost £69 million to the European Space Agency's first European remote sensing satellite, ERS-1, which is due to be launched shortly. The Science and Engineering Research Council has also spent some £6 million in developing and supplying the along-track scanning radiometer—ATSR—instrument which will be flown on this satellite. Through the British developed synthetic aperture radar instrument to be carried on ERS-1, we will gain the capability to observe the earth's surface through cloud and in darkness. The ATSR will provide unprecedently accurate measurement of sea surface temperature.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), on 2 May, *Official Report*, column *283*, he will give an estimate for the total sum to be paid out in fees by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to management consultants in connection with the proposed privatisation of the short-term insurance business of ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* About £3·5 million has been paid out in fees by ECGD to professional advisers up to 31 March 1991. Expenditure in 1991-92 will depend on progress with the privatisation, but current indications are that further costs of between £2 million and £3 million will be incurred.

The costs of the current privatisation of the short-term business of ECGD, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed.

Export Credits (Soviet Union)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the current review of medium-term export credits for the Soviet Union to be completed.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Shortly.

Exports (USSR)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what efforts he is making to improve the level of United Kingdom exports to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Overseas Trade Services staff in the United Kingdom and Moscow provide a range of services to assist companies exporting to the USSR.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service which of the 50 executive agencies are run on a trading fund basis; which are subject to gross running costs control; and which are subject to net running costs control.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is as follows.

Next Steps—Established Agencies	*Financial Regimes*
Building Research Establishment	NRC
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	GRC
Central Office of Information	TF
Central Veterinary Laboratory	NRC
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	GRC

Next Steps—Established Agencies	*Financial Regimes*
Civil Service College	NRC
Companies House	NRC
Defence Research Agency	GRC
Directorate General of Defence Accounts	GRC
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	GRC
Driving Standards Agency	OVTB
Employment Service	GRC
Forensic Science Service	GRC
Historic Royal Palaces	NRC
Historic Scotland	GRC
HMSO	TF
Hydrographic Office	GRC
Information Technology Services Agency	GRC
Insolvency Service	GRC
Intervention Board	GRC
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	NRC
Land Registry	NRC
Meteorological Office	GRC
Military Survey	GRC
National Engineering Laboratory	GRC
National Physical Laboratory	NRC
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	GRC
Natural Resources Institute	NRC
NHS Estates	GRC
Occupational Health Service	GRC
Ordnance Survey	NRC
Patent Office	NRC
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	NRC
Radiocommunications Agency	NRC
RAF Maintenance	GRC
Rate Collection Agency (Northern Ireland)	GRC
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	GRC
Registers of Scotland	NRC
Resettlement Agency	GRC
Royal Mint	TF
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	GRC
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)	GRC
Social Security Benefits Agency	GRC
Social Security Contributions Agency	GRC
Training & Employment Agency (Northern Ireland)	GRC
United Kingdom Passport Agency	GRC
Vehicle Certification Agency	NRC
Vehicle Inspectorate	TF
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	GRC
Warren Spring Laboratory	NRC

50 in number

Key:
GRC—Gross Running Costs.
NRC—Net Running Costs.
TF—Trading Fund.
OVTB—Driving Standards Agency is a non-statutory on-Vote trading body whose current expenses are not classified as public expenditure.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list all agency chief executives, and their grade stating whether they were appointed through open competition and whether they were serving civil servants or direct entrants.

Mr. Renton: The table provides the information requested in respect of the 50 existing "next steps" agency chief executives at 10 May 1991. The Government's objective is to secure the right person for each of these important jobs, and open competition is now the presumption in doing so. With the exception of the defence support agencies, chief executives are directly accountable to the appropriate Minister; and many chief executives have pay arrangements tailored to their particular employment.

Agency	*Chief Executive*	*Civil Service Grade*	*Method of Appointment*	*Origin*
Building Research Establishment	Dr. Roger Courtney	3	Internal appointment	serving civil servant
CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments)	John Carr	5	open competition	direct entrant
Central Office of Information	Michael Devereau	4	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Central Veterinary Laboratory	Tony Little	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Chemical Biological Defence Establishment	Dr. Graham Pearson CB	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Civil Service College	Marianne Neville-Rolfe	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Companies House	David Durham	4	open competition	direct entrant
Defence Research Agency	Nigel Hughes	2	open competition	serving civil servant
Directorate General of Defence Accounts	Michael Dymond	4	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Stephen Curtis	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Driving Standards Agency	Dr. Christopher Woodman	5	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Employment Service	Michael Fogden	3[1]	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Forensic Science Service	Dr. Janet Thompson	4	open competition	serving civil servant
Historic Royal Palaces	David Beeton	3	open competition	direct entrant
Historic Scotland	Graeme Munro	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
HMSO	Dr. Paul Freeman	2	open competition	serving civil servant
Hydrographic Office	Rear Admiral John Myers	—	armed forces appointment	armed forces
Information Technology Services Agency	John Kenworthy	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Insolvency Service	Peter Joyce	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Intervention Board	Guy Stapleton	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	Dr. Richard Worswick	3	open competition	direct entrant
Land Registry	John Manthorpe	2	open competition	serving civil servant
Meteorological Office	Dr. John Houghton CBE	2	open competition	direct entrant
Military Survey	Major General Roy Wood	—	armed forces appointment	armed forces
National Engineering Laboratory	William Edgar	3	open competition	direct entrant
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	Dr. Seton Bennett	5	open competition	serving civil servant
National Physical Laboratory	Dr. Peter Clapham	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Natural Resources Institute	Anthony Beattie	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant

Agency	*Chief Executive*	*Civil Service Grade*	*Method of Appointment*	*Origin*
NHS Estates	John Locke	3	open competition	direct entrant
Occupational Health Service	Dr. George Sorrie	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Ordnance Survey	Peter McMaster	3	open competition	direct entrant
Patent Office	Paul Hartnack	3	open competition	serving civil servant
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	Roy Kendrick	5	open competition	direct entrant
Radiocommunications Agency	John Michell	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant
RAF Maintenance	Air Vice Marshall Don Campbell	—	armed forces appointment	armed forces
Rate Collection Agency (Northern Ireland)	David Gallagher	6	open competition	serving civil servant
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	Michael Geddes	3	open competition	direct entrant
Registers of Scotland	James Barron	4	open competition	serving civil servant
Resettlement Agency	Tony Ward	6	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Royal Mint	Tony Garrett	3	open competition	direct entrant
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	Andrew McLeod	5	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Service Childrens' Schools (North West Europe)	Ian Mitchelson	4	open competition	direct entrant
Social Security Benefits Agency	Michael Bichard	2	open competition	direct entrant
Social Security Contributions Agency	Ann Chant	5	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland)	Julian Crozier	3	open competition	serving civil servant
UK Passport Agency	John Hayzelden	5	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Vehicle Certification Agency	Derek Harvey	5	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Vehicle Inspectorate	Ron Oliver	4	internal appointment	serving civil servant
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	Dr. Michael Rutter	4	open competition	direct entrant
Warren Springs Laboratory	Dr. John Reay	3	internal appointment	serving civil servant

[1] Defence Support Agency

Civil Service College

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Civil Service College; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Renton: The management of the college's annual budget is a matter for the chief executive and I have asked her to write to the hon. Member direct.

Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Renton: The management of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency annual budget is a matter for the chief executive and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member direct.

Efficiency Scrutinies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many efficiency scrutinies there have been since 1979.

Mr. Renton: A total of 309 efficiency scrutinies have been completed by Government Departments, in association with the efficiency adviser and the efficiency unit, since 1979, Twenty interdepartmental studies have also been completed over the same period. A number of scrutinies have also been conducted by other public sector organisations according to full scrutiny disciplines and with guidance from the efficiency unit.

Occupational Health Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Occupational Health Service; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Renton: The management of the Occupational Health Service's annual budget is a matter for the chief executive and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member direct.

Agency Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will clarify the numbers included in the table of staff employed in existing executive agencies which appeared in the *Official Report*, 30 April 1991, columns *112-13*.

Mr. Renton: I apologise for the fact that, owing to an administrative error, the final '0' was omitted from the numbers given in this table. The correct figures are included in the following table.

Next Steps—Executive Agencies established as of April 1991

	Number
Building Research Establishment	690
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	220
Central Office of Information[1]	730
Central Veterinary Laboratory	580
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment[2]	580
Civil Service College	210
Companies House	1,150
Defence Research Agency	11,700
Directorate General of Defence Accounts[2]	2,100
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	5,450
Driving Standards Agency	2,050
Employment Service	35,600
Forensic Science Service	580

	Number
Historic Royal Palaces	300
Historic Scotland	580
HMSO[1]	3,300
Hydrographic Office[2]	880
Information Technology Services Agency	3,350
Insolvency Service	1,450
Intervention Board	910
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	320
Land Registry	10,400
Meteorological Office	2,250
Military Survey[2]	850
National Engineering Laboratory	430
National Physical Laboratory	820
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	50
Natural Resources Institute	390
NHS Estates	120
Occupational Health Service	100
Ordnance Survey	2,500
Patent Office	1,150
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	70
Radiocommunications Agency	500
RAF Maintenance[2]	5,700
Rate Collection Agency (Northern Ireland)	280
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	320
Registers of Scotland	1,100
Resettlement Agency	510
Royal Mint[1]	1,050
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	230
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)[3]	2,300
Social Security Benefits Agency	68,000
Social Security Contributions Agency	6,600
Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland)	1,700
UK Passport Agency	1,200
Vehicle Certification Agency	70
Vehicle Inspectorate[1]	1,650
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	70
Warren Spring Laboratory	320
50 in number	183,460
Customs and Excise[3] (30 Executive Units)	26,800
	210,260

[1] Trading funds.
[2] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[3] Moving towards full operation on next steps lines following publication of framework documents.
Staffing figures are based on staff in post 1 October 1990.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Natural Resources Institute; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mrs. Chalker: I have asked the chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute to write to the hon. Member.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Overseas Development Administration has to contribute to the United Nations Security Council appeal issued on 29 April for assistance to the 21 countries with special economic problems arising from their compliance with sanctions imposed against Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: Many of the countries adversely affected by the Gulf crisis are recipients of substantial British aid. It is primarily for the international financial institutions to tackle additional financing needs arising from the crisis, in the context of each country's overall balance of payments situation and economic adjustment efforts. We have supported the provision of additional finance through the International Monetary Fund and the World bank and are accelerating our International Development Association contributions to help finance increased World bank lending to the poorest countries.

Disaster Relief Appeals

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Overseas Development Administration contributions made during 1991 to disaster relief appeals; and if he has any plans to contribute to any further appeals in the near future.

Mrs. Chalker: Since 1 January 1991, the Overseas Development Administration has made the following contributions to international agency and other appeals.
US$1 million to UNDRO Gulf Contingency Planning appeal
£2·5 million to ICRC Gulf appeal
£5 million to UNHCR Africa appeals
£3 million to UNHCR Mozambique Refugees appeal
£3 million to ICRC for Horn of Africa appeals
£2 million to ICRC for Iraqi refugees in Iran
£10 million to 'Simple Truth' Appeal
US$10 million to UN appeals for Iraqi refugees
£0·25 million to LRCS for Bangladesh appeal
£0·5 million to UNDRO for Bangladesh appeal
The Government are considering further responses to appeals by the international agencies.

Botswana

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part the senior veterinary officers, funded by his Department in Botswana, have played in the development and implementation of that country's policy of veterinary cordon fencing.

Mrs. Chalker: These officers are employed by the Government of Botswana: the United Kingdom aid programme helps the Botswana Government meet part of their costs. They are engaged in a variety of duties relating to livestock production, including the provision of professional advice on issues such as cordon fencing where relevant to their duties.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding his Department provides in respect of the principal hydrological adviser for the southern Okavango integrated water development scheme in Botswana.

Mrs. Chalker: The salary of the principal hydrological adviser, who is an employee of the Government of Botswana, is part-funded under the aid programme at a cost of some £15,000 per annum.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there has been an independent environmental impact assessment of the proposed southern Okavango integrated water development scheme which is receiving ODA funding.

Mrs. Chalker: A full environmental impact assessment was carried out in connection with the first phase of the

project in the mid-1980s. A further investigation has recently been undertaken by Greenpeace at the invitation of the Botswana Government and its report is now being considered. The ODA was not involved in the funding of either study.

Environmental Assessments

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of environmental assessment is conducted for activities undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: All programme managers in the Overseas Development Administration are required to ensure the environmental soundness of projects. Some projects may only require an initial environmental screening, whilst others may require a full environmental impact assessment. A manual of environmental appraisal to help programme managers judge the level of environmental assessment required was issued in March 1989 and is accompanied by a mandatory training seminar. A copy of the manual is in the Library. The manual is currently being up-dated.

Kurdistan and Bangladesh

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates he has of the cost to the Overseas Development Administration of the use of Ministry of Defence forces in humanitarian relief in *(a)* Kurdistan and *(b)* Bangladesh.

Mrs. Chalker: Under longstanding arrangements for cost-sharing, the Overseas Development Administration refunds to the Ministry of Defence only the additional costs incurred as a direct result of the armed forces' involvement in disaster relief operations overseas.

The cost to the ODA of service participation in relief operations for Iraqi refugees up to and including 9 May is estimated at £5 million. Continuing costs thereafter, at present rates of activity, are estimated at £500,000 per week. The initial estimate of the total cost to ODA of the armed forces' contribution to cyclone relief in Bangladesh is £250,000.

United Nations Organisations

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a chart showing the United Kingdom's contribution to the United Nations Development Programme, the UNICEF core programme, the United Nations disaster relief co-ordinator, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme, in 1979 and 1991, in current prices, and in constant 1991 prices, showing for each the percentage change between 1979 and 1991.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 9 May 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Contributions in 1979 and 1989 at current and constant prices

£ thousands

	1979 (current prices)	*1979 (at constant 1989 prices)*	*1989*	*Percentage change in 1989 prices*	*Percentage change in current prices*
UNDP	28·533	59·058	26·001	−55·9	−8·9
UNICEF[1]	5·800	12·005	8·000	−33·4	+37·9
UNDRO	100	207	391	+88·9	+391·0
UNHCR	8·987	18·601	19·316	+3·8	+214·9
WFP[2]	7·017	14·524	15·674	—	—

[1] Contribution to core programme only.

[2] Figures for 1979 and 1989 for WFP are not comparable. Prior to 1987 some food aid through the world food programme was classified as bilateral aid and therefore is not included in the 1979 figure. It is not possible retrospectively to identify these amounts. Therefore the percentage change has not been calculated.

Note: Information is based on 1989 prices, using 1989 expenditure figures. This is the most recent year for which firm figures are available.

PRIME MINISTER

Turkey (British Journalists)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government have made representations to Turkey over the detention and expulsion of Robert Fisk, a journalist working for *The Independent*, and the banning of all journalists of *The Independent* from working in Turkey.

The Prime Minister: The detention and expulsion of Mr. Fisk and the future of *The Independent*'s representation in Turkey have been discussed by the British ambassador in Ankara with the Turkish authorities. We naturally wish for *The Independent* to have effective representation in Turkey.

Inaccurate Information

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list in the *Official Report* each instance of inadvertently inaccurate information given to Parliament since 1979 by Ministers of Her Majesty's Government which was subsequently corrected in the *Official Report*; and what steps he is taking to improve the accuracy of information given to Parliament by Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: Records are not maintained of corrections to the *Official Report*. Ministers seek the highest standards of accuracy in the information they give to Parliament.

Occupied Territories (Education)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has made to the Israeli Prime Minister about the continuing closure of Palestinian schools, colleges and universities in the territories occupied by Israel; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made representations on education in the occupied territories when he saw the Israeli Foreign Minister last on 5 March. This issue was also raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State during his visit to Israel and the occupied territories from 6 to 9 May.

Scrutiny Programme

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Prime Minister what topics have been covered in the efficiency unit's central scrutiny programme in the last financial year; and which scrutiny reports have been published.

The Prime Minister: Twenty efficiency scrutinies have been undertaken by Departments in 1990-91 in association with the efficiency adviser and the efficiency unit. The programme of scrutinies, including those which are not yet completed, is as follows:

Department	*Title of scrutiny*	*Report:* *Completed*	*Publicly available*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Career Management	Yes	No
Cabinet Office	Ministerial Correspondence	Yes	Yes
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	Inland Customs Activity	Yes	Yes
Ministry of Defence	Electronics Trades Training	Yes	No
	Equipment Policy Committee	No	—
Department of Education and Science	Research Councils' Support Services	No	—
Department of Employment	Communications within the ED Group	Yes	No
	Industrial Tribunal System	No	—
Department of Environment	Review of the Housing Defects Act	No	—
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Training in Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office	No	—
Department of Health	Medical Divisions	Yes	No
Home Office	In-Service Probation Training	Yes	Yes
	National Collection of Criminal Records	Yes	No
Inland Revenue	Departmental Print Output	Yes	No
	Electronic Data Capture and Data Matching	Yes	No
Lord Chancellor's Department	Public Record Office	Yes	Yes
Northern Ireland Civil Service	Creditor Payments	Yes	No
Department of Trade and Industry	Fairs and Promotions Branch	No	—
Department of Transport	Relationship between Agencies and the Centre of the Department	Yes	Yes
Welsh Office	Land Procedures	No	—

Decisions on the publication of scrutiny reports are taken by the Ministers responsible for the scrutinies concerned. In a number of cases where a scrutiny has been recently completed, no decision on publication has been made.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 14 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Urban Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners if the Church Commissioners have changed their policy of contributing £1 million annually to the church urban fund.

Mr. Alison: The primary call on the Commissioners' income is the provision of clergy pensions and thereafter clergy stipends and housing. Each year they may make grants for other purposes from any surplus income they may have. They have in each of the past four years, voted a grant of £1 million for the church urban fund; it is not, however, an automatically recurring "annual" grant.

The Commissioners will, at their annual general meeting in June, carefully consider, in the light of their overall financial position and other demands on their income, whether they can make a contribution in 1991 and, if so, at what level.

Their substantial administrative help to the fund, totalling around £300,000 a year, will, in any event, continue.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Building Societies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis he has calculated that building societies would not be repaid £250 million if the House accepts his proposal, retrospectively, to reverse the House of Lords decision in the Woolwich case.

Mr. Maples: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 22 April, at columns *300-1*.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether building societies have agreed that the 1986 change in accounting for tax does not mean they have paid extra tax.

Mr. Maples: It would not be appropriate to comment on statements made by individual building societies about their tax affairs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what response or acknowledgement has been given to the demand on 25 October 1990 for repayment of tax unlawfully demanded from a building society, following the judgment in the Woolwich case;

(2) how much tax has been received each financial year and for each financial year from building societies since 1983-84; how much was paid with the qualification that the payment was made under protest; how much is now known to have been demanded unlawfully; and how much has been repaid.

Mr. Maples: It would not be appropriate to comment on the tax affairs of individual building societies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the probable cost of acknowledging letters *(a)* directly and *(b)* via an hon. Member to each or any member of a building society adversely affected by clause 50 of the Finance Bill.

Mr. Maples: The cost of replying to letters, whether received directly, or through hon. Members, depends upon the complexity of the issues raised and the research necessary to deal with them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which building societies did not challenge the double taxation damand under the 1986 legislation on building societies.

Mr. Maples: The 1986 building societies legislation did not involve double taxation. It would not be appropriate to comment on the tax affairs of individual building societies.

Retrospective Legislation

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, other than following the Woolwich case, the Treasury has proposed retrospective legislation to have the effect of reversing a granted application for judicial review or a successful appeal against assessment.

Mr. Maples: There have been two instances of such legislation in recent years: section 62 of the Finance Act 1987 and section 116 of the Finance Act 1989.

Leeds Building Society

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions Treasury Ministers met representatives of the Leeds building society in 1985; and what was discussed.

Mr. Maples: There is no record of any such meeting. If my hon. Friend has a particular meeting in mind, perhaps he could let me know.

Soft Drinks (VAT)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an estimate of the revenue from value added tax on soft drinks at the rate of 17·5 per cent. for the current financial year; and what the comparable figures would be if the rate were to be *(a)* 4 per cent. and *(b)* 9 per cent.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The following are estimates of the value added tax receipts in 1991-92 assuming the rates apply to a full year's expenditure.

VAT rate	*Revenue yield from soft drinks £ million*
17·5 per cent.	520
4·0 per cent.	120
9·0 per cent.	270

Beer Duty

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the comparable rates of beer duty in each country of the European Community at present; when it is proposed to harmonise these rates; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy and proposals in this matter.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Rates of excise duty on beer in other member states of the Community, according to the latest information available, are set out in the table. The Commission's revised excise duty rate proposals for alcoholic drinks envisage minimum rates of duty to be applied by 1 January 1993 with higher, target rates to be reached by an unspecified later date. The Government's view remains that centrally determined duty rates are neither necessary nor appropriate to achieve the single market.

Country	*Beer at 3·65 per cent. alc. by vol. 1038° OG (p per pint)*
Belgium	4
Denmark	31
France	1
Germany	2
Greece	2
Ireland	33
Italy	5
Luxembourg	2
Netherlands	7
Portugal	3
Spain	1
United Kingdom	23

Rates of exchange as at 8 May 1991.
Source: EC Inventory of Taxes.

Research and Development

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the amounts of public funding allocated by his Department or through other Departments after Treasury sanction to United Kingdom companies for research and development projects and direct Government contracts in each of the fiscal years 1979-80 and 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* The figures for total research and development, including development studies, spending by Her Majesty's Treasury are as follows:

	£'000s
1983-84	1,930
1984-85	4,122
1985-86	4,007

	£'000s
1986-87	3,321
1987-88	4,038
1988-89	4,509
1989-90	2,578

Figures for earlier years are unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The table does not include Treasury-sanctioned expenditure by other Government Departments. Information on Government spending as a whole is set out in the Cabinet Office publication "Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development", published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Live Animals and Birds (Imports)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those United Kingdom ports of entry which received consignments of live animals or birds in each year since 1987.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Consignments of live animals or birds have been received at the following ports of entry in the years indicated.

Table of ports receiving live animals and birds

	1988	*1989*	*1990*
Ports			
Cardiff	/		/
Dover	/	/	/
Felixstowe	/	/	/
Fishguard	/	/	/
Folkestone	/		
Great Yarmouth	/	/	/
Grimsby	/	/	/
Harwich	/	/	/
Holyhead	/	/	/
Hull	/	/	/
Immingham	/	/	/
Ipswich			/
Liverpol	/	/	/
London	/		
Londonderry			/
Medway	/	/	/
Middlesbrough		/	
Milford Haven	/	/	/
Newhaven	/		
Poole	/	/	/
Portsmouth	/	/	/
Plymouth		/	
Ramsgate		/	/
Sharpness		/	
Silloth		/	
Southampton	/	/	/
Swansea	/		/
Tyne	/	/	/
Airports			
Belfast	/	/	
Birmingham	/	/	
Bristol			/
East Midlands	/	/	/
Glasgow	/	/	/
London Gatwick	/	/	/
London Heathrow	/	/	/
London Stansted	/	/	/
Luton	/	/	/
Manchester	/	/	/
Prestwick	/		/
Southend		/	
Other	/	/	/
Irish Land Boundary	/	/	/

Note: 1990 details are provisional

Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish details of all endangered species products currently held by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise following seizures made *(a)* from 1979 to 1986 and *(b)* from 1986 to date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Records of endangered species products held by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are not kept centrally and the information sought could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Reptile Imports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state *(a)* the total number of live reptiles confiscated or seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1990 *(b)* the number of prosecutions entered from such seizures and *(c)* the number of resulting convictions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* A total of 1,567 live reptiles and amphibians were seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1990. There were no prosecutions entered from those seizures.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turtles

58. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom intends to take out reservations under the specially protected areas and wildlife protocol of the Cartagena convention on any of the sea turtle species.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Decisions on the proposed listings of species on the annexes to the SPAW protocol of the Cartagena convention will be made at a meeting of the plenipotentiaries in Kingston in June.

59. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the position of the sea turtle farm on the British dependent territory of the Cayman Islands in relation to the Annex II listing of green turtles under the specially protected areas and wildlife protocol of the Cartagena convention.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In advance of the meeting of signatories to the SPAW protocol in Kingston next month we shall be discussing with our interested dependent territories the implications of the listing of species on the annexes to the protocol.

60. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will be supporting the listing of each of the *(a)* green turtle (Chelonia mydas), *(b)* Hawksbill turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata), *(c)* Kemp's Ridley (Lepidochelys kempii), *(d)* Olive Ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea), *(e)* Loggerhead (Caretta caretta) and *(f)* Leatherback turtle (Dermochelys coriacea) on annex II of the specially protected areas and wildlife protocol of the Cartagena convention.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom delegation will be participating fully in the discussions at the

conference of plenipotentiaries for the adoption of annexes of the SPAW protocol of the Cartagena convention. The listing of the various species of turtle will be one of the issues under discussion.

Turkey (British Journalists)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Turkish Government concerning the arrest of the British journalists Robert Fisk of *The Independent* and Robert Fox of *The Daily Telegraph*, and the declaration of *The Independent* staff Christopher Bellamy, Phil Reeves and Richard Wayman as persona non grata in Turkey.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The detention and expulsion of Mr. Fisk and the future of *The Independent's* representation in Turkey have been discussed by the British ambassador in Ankara with the Turkish authorities. We naturally wish for *The Independent* to have effective representation in Turkey.

Kuwait (Human Rights)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has taken any steps to obtain independent verification of Kuwaiti observance of human rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in close touch, both here and in Kuwait, with international humanitarian agencies and human rights organisations monitoring the position of vulnerable groups in that country.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister of State, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), raised Israeli membership of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty during his meeting with the Israeli Foreign Minister in Israel on 6 May.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I met the deputy Foreign Minister on 8 May. The issue was not raised on this occasion.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were raised during his recent meeting with his Saudi counterpart and other Ministers and officials of the Saudi Arabian Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 8 May, *Official Report*, column *473-75*.

Occupied Territories (Education)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to his Israeli counterpart to open the Palestinian schools, colleges and universities of the occupied territories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made representations on education in the occupied territories when he saw the Israeli Foreign Minister last on 5 March. This issue was also raised by me during my visit to Israel and the occupied territories from 6 to 9 May.

Hostages

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact Her Majesty's Government has had with the Iranian Government on the question of hostages in the Lebanon.

Mr. Hurd: We are keeping in close touch with the Iranian Government on the hostage issue. As we have made clear, we wish to see the release of the hostages as soon as possible. The Iranian Government have said that they will continue to use their influence to achieve this. We obviously hope that they will be successful, and that we can finally close a sad chapter of hostage taking.

South Africa

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place in the United Nations committee against apartheid regarding his planned visit to South Africa later this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are not aware of any discussions of this matter within the United Nations special committee against apartheid.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Library Facilities

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Library facilities in 1 Derby Gate will be available for hon. Members and their staff; what services they will provide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked as Chairman of the Services Committee to inform Members that the new Library facilities established in 1 Derby Gate, at the northern end of the phase 1 building, will open on Monday 17 June at 10 am. Leaflets explaining the effects of the move and the facilities available thereafter are to be sent to every Member and will also be available in the Library.

The move will begin during the spring recess. As a consequence service from the Norman Shaw branch library will cease at 4.30 pm on Friday 24 May. Because of the need to relocate equipment there will be no Library facilities available for Members' staff for a period of 14 working days thereafter, except for those with category 9B passes who will retain their usual right of access to the Members' Library.

During the move, services in the Oriel and Reference Rooms will continue unaffected. Representatives from the international affairs and research sections will be available in room A, while representatives from the statistical section will attend in room C.

The move will enable the research sections to be brought together in Derby Gate and will allow improvements to be made in the service provided in the Members' Library. From autumn 1991 the Library will also have its own video viewing room in the North Curtain area, which will contain facilities for individuals and groups.

Full details of the move and its consequences are contained in the Library's leaflet.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Clerk's Department

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will set out the educational qualifications of staff in the Clerk's Department of the House of Commons showing, for the graduates, degree subject and university or college attended.

Mr. Beith: Much of the information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The educational qualifications required of Clerk of the House Department staff on entry to the service are broadly in line with those required of analogous grades in other Departments of the House and in the civil service.

TRANSPORT

Motor Vehicles (Crime Prevention)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department are taking to achieve in-built motor vehicle crime prevention and to have part I and part VI of the relevant British standards made obligatory for manufacturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We presented proposals to the European Commission first in 1988 and in revised form in May 1990 to include in the EC directive on vehicle security requirements for mechanical locking systems based on part 1 of the British standard BS AU 209. These proposals have so far been resisted by some other member states; but with the co-operation of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders we intend to submit later this year further proposals and press for their early adoption. We are also preparing proposals for further amendment to the EC directive based on parts 5 and 6 of BS AU 209 covering central and dead locking systems. We are currently considering other possibilities for improving vehicle security but until we obtain agreement to an amended EC directive, our freedom to regulate is limited.

Smoking

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the penalties attaching to the offence of *(a)* a passenger smoking on a London bus and *(b)* a London taxi driver refusing to allow smoking by a passenger;

(2) under what powers London Regional Transport prohibits smoking; and what powers are available for London taxis to prohibit smoking.

Mr. McLoughlin: London Transport prohibit smoking on buses under section 6 of the Passenger Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors and Passengers) Regulations 1990 and a fine of up to £400 can be imposed for non-compliance with the ban. London taxi drivers have no powers to prohibit smoking in their vehicles; drivers who refuse to carry passengers without reasonable grounds may be fined up to £50 by the courts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether airline, bus, cab or rail operators require any authorisation or parliamentary or police approval to prohibit smoking by passengers.

Mr. McLoughlin: Airlines and bus operators have discretionary powers under statute to restrict or prohibit smoking by passengers. British Rail, London Underground and the Tyne and Wear Metro have powers under byelaws to do the same. Licensed taxi operators and drivers have no powers to prohibit or restrict smoking in their vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received asking him to maintain the regulation requiring London taxi drivers to allow passengers to smoke.

Mr. McLoughlin: None.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will introduce legislation to allow London taxi drivers to forbid smoking in cabs;

(2) what regulations govern whether a London cab passenger can insist on smoking; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what information he has as to cities and towns in which the police can require taxi drivers to allow passengers to smoke;

(4) what advice the Metropolitan police have given licensed London taxi drivers on allowing passengers to smoke in their cabs; and whether under current regulations the Metropolitan police have the discretion to change the rule.

Mr. McLoughlin: In law, taxi drivers throughout England and Wales must accept hirings for journeys of a prescribed distance within the licensing area unless they have reasonable grounds for refusing. Ultimately it is for the courts to decide what are reasonable grounds. To specify in law reasons for refusal runs the risk of undermining this vital rule of taxi operation. Taxi drivers can only request passengers to refrain from smoking in their cabs, which is the advice offered to London drivers by the Metropolitan police. There are at present no plans to legislate further in this area.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the present restrictions upon continuous driving by taxi drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are no restrictions on the hours which taxi drivers may work. The nature of their operations is such that drivers are mostly employed on numerous short journeys between which there can often be long idle periods. However, consultation is currently being undertaken to gauge whether this is considered to be a problem which is posing a serious safety hazard. If it is, we shall have to identify appropriate remedial measures.

Highway Reconstruction

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much the Yorkshire Water Company has contributed during *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* the previous 12 months to costs of highway reconstruction for roads within his responsibility following water main bursts;

(2) how much the Yorkshire Electricity Company has contributed during *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* the previous 12 months to costs of highway reconstruction for roads within his responsibility, following cable repairs.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Transport Privatisation

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), *Official Report*, 23 April, columns *392-93*, if he has received any further representations regarding the privatisation of municipal airports, ports, harbours and bus companies.

Mr. McLoughlin: Not as far as I am aware.

Train Deaths

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement as to the steps he is taking both to investigate and to curb the number of movement accidents, involving 19 deaths, arising from intermittent faults on slam-shut doors on British Rail passenger coaches.

Mr. Freeman: I greatly regret the 19 deaths which occurred in 1990—the same number as in the previous two years—due to passengers falling from trains, but there is no direct evidence that faulty doors were responsible. We are concerned to find out the cause of the accidents. With the agreement of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Health and Safety Commission has asked the Health and Safety Executive to undertake an independent investigation into the pattern of falls from trains, and to see whether, or the extent to which, they could be attributable to the design of the doors or locks. The investigation will be led by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Driving Standards Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Chope: The Driving Standards Agency plans to spend £50·4 million in 1991-92, 68 per cent. of which would be direct staff costs.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the vehicle inspectorate; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Chope: The 1991-92 annual cash budget for the vehicle inspectorate is £41,202,000. Of this annual budget, 60 per cent. is allocated to staff costs.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is being considered as a candidate for privatisation.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Chope: The DVLA's gross voted provision for 1991-92 is £178·056 million of which £159·074 million is for running costs. Salaries are not ring fenced within running costs, but are expected to absorb about one third of the total budget.

Vehicle Certification Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Vehicle Certification Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Chope: The 1991-92 annual budget for the Vehicle Certification Agency is £2,625,000. Of that, approximately 63 per cent. is allocated to staff costs.

Hazardous Chemicals (Shipment)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out all regulations in place to cover the shipment of toxic and hazardous chemicals, including wastes, in the English, Irish and Bristol channels.

Mr. McLoughlin: The regulations covering the shipment of toxic and hazardous chemicals by sea are as follows:

The Merchant Shipping (Tankers) (EEC Requirements) Regulations 1981.

The Merchant Shipping (Tankers) (EEC Requirements) (Amendment) Regulations 1982.

The Merchant Shipping (Gas Carriers) Regulations 1986.

The Merchant Shipping (IBC Code) Regulations 1987.

The Merchant Shipping (BCH Code) Regulations 1987.

The Merchant Shipping (IBC Code) (Amendment) Regulations 1990.

The Merchant Shipping (BCH Code) (Amendment) Regulations 1990.

Road Schemes, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement listing the money his Department has contributed to road schemes in Waveney for each of the past 10 years; and what are his forward plans on spending for the next three years.

Mr. Chope: My Department pays 50 per cent. transport supplementary grant—TSG—towards accepted expenditure on local authority road schemes.

Before 1985-86 transport supplementary grant was a general grant and not linked to individual projects. Under the present system, expenditure on specified major road schemes may be accepted for grant. Since 1985-86 accepted expenditure for such schemes in the Waveney district council area has been as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	Nil
1986-87	Nil
1987-88	0·385
1988-89	3·360
1989-90	1·582
1990-91	1·532
1991-92	6·741

Block transport supplementary grant allocations are also given for expenditure on minor works in the county as a whole, but it is for the county council to decide how much to spend in each district council's area.

I cannot say exactly how much expenditure in any county or district area will be accepted for transport supplementary grant in future years as this is decided in the light of information in highway authorities' annual transport policies and programme submissions. However on the basis of forecasts in Suffolk's last submission accepted expenditure on the Mutford Bridge scheme in Lowestoft, for which the works contract was recently let, will be £1·775 million in 1992-93 and £0·075 million in 1993-94.

In addition, the Department has carried out a number of minor improvement schemes on the A12 in the Lowestoft area.

Maritime Works, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement listing the role of his Department and the money it has spent on maritime activities in the constituency of Waveney for each of the past 10 years; and what his forward plans are for the next three years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The work undertaken by the Department of Transport's surveyor general's organisation in the constituency of Waveney includes the survey, certification and inspection of United Kingdom registered seagoing ships, fishing vessels and passenger craft; the inspection of foreign flag ships under the memorandum of understanding on port state control; the examination of candidates for the issue of statutory seagoing certification; and, as necessary, the investigation of ship accidents. The Department's marine pollution control unit is responsible for planning contingency arrangements and taking charge of operations to deal with pollution arising from shipping casualties. Her Majesty's coastguard is responsible for initiating and co-ordinating civil maritime search and rescue measures from two coastguard stations within the constituency, at Lowestoft and Southwold. The Department manages the general lighthouse fund, which finances Trinity House's expenditure on general navigational aids in the area. These comprise two lighthouses and 12 lighted buoys. Trinity House also regularly surveys the Holme channel approaches to Lowestoft and inspects some 219 local aids to navigation, including many on the River Waveney.

All these activities form part of the Department's forward plans for the next three years. Information about expenditure on them in the constituency of Waveney could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, in 1990-91, £42,000 was spent on aquiring new premises for the coastguard station at Southwold and the Department paid £325,000 in 1989-90 and £14,000 in 1990-91 towards the cost of compensation of redundant dock workers at Lowestoft.

Alitalia Near Miss

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the CAA to conclude its investigation of the near miss between an aircraft and a missile, reported by the captain of an Alitalia flight on 21 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin: The statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation rests with the Civil Aviation Authority.

This incident was initially reported to the CAA under its mandatory occurrence reporting scheme and has not been reported by the pilot or the operating company as an "airmiss". The investigation is continuing but the technical facts which have been established indicate that the object sighted was almost certainly not a missile.

I have drawn the hon. Member's question to the attention of the Civil Aviation Authority and will ask it to write to him direct when its investigations are concluded.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans exist to deal with the accidental downing of aircraft.

Mr. McLoughlin: The responsibility for dealing with any accident that brings an aircraft to earth outside an airport lies with the local emergency services who will have appropriate contingency plans. The Department's air accidents investigation branch is responsible for investigating the cause of the accident.

British Rail Investments

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all British Rail current investments approved by his Department which are being delayed or deferred due to falling British Rail revenue.

Mr. Freeman: The timing and implementation of investment schemes are matters for British Rail within the overall funds available to the board. But I am not aware of any schemes that we have previously approved which are currently being delayed for financial reasons.

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the number of investment proposals over £100,000 submitted to him by British Rail which await decision; and if he will give the date of submission of each proposal.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* In general, only certain British Rail investment projects costing over £10 million require specific approval of the Secretary of State. We have just approved 86 class 466 Networker electric vehicles for south-east London and north-west Kent services. We are currently considering proposals for a further 188 class 465 Networkers and for Ashford international station, both originally submitted in January, in the light of subsequent information from British Rail.

Local Improvement Schemes

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all current local improvement schemes approved by his Department which are being delayed or deferred due to the current economic climate.

Mr. Chope: The timing of expenditure on each of the 304 major local authority highway schemes currently accepted for transport supplementary grant support, is a matter for the individual authorities concerned. Like most major projects, such schemes may be delayed for a variety of reasons before and after the start of construction.

Around 150 new schemes were put forward for transport supplementary grant acceptance last year but, despite a 17 per cent. increase in the overall amount of grant available, it was possible to accept only 35 of them for grant.

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incidents of radioactive contamination have occurred since 1979 involving the import of foreign spent fuel into British ports and subsequent road and rail transport to Sellafield or Dounreay.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* During the period 1979 to the present day there has been only one reported incident of radioactive contamination involving the import of foreign spent fuel. This occurred in January 1991 and involved a shipment of irradiated test reactor fuel from India to Dounreay. The level of contamination on both the spent fuel flask and the transport frame was found to be low but nevertheless, the frame was removed to the Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell to be decontaminated. It has since been returned to use.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions each year since 1979 irradiated test reactor fuel from Harwell has been transported by road to Dounreay; what safeguards provisions covered the fuel in transit; and whether any accident has taken place in the road transport of nuclear materials from Harwell to Dounreay.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* During the period 1979 to the present day there have been 99 such movements as follows:

Shipments per year

Year	*Total*
1979	8
1980	10
1981	12
1982	6
1983	9
1984	0
1985	10
1986	13
1987	4
1988	10
1989	7
1990	10
1991	0

The fuel in transit was subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the United Kingdom/International Atomic Energy Authority/Euratom safeguards agreement.

There have been no accidents reportable under the Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) (Great Britain) Regulations 1974—SI No. 1735—during this period, but I am aware of two minor road traffic accidents, neither of which involved any injuries to people or damage to the flasks or their contents.

British Rail (Capital Projects)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the approvals for capital projects given by the Secretary of State for Transport to British Rail over the last three years and the principal contractors and consultants chosen to undertake the work.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 13 April 1991]:* Since May 1988 we have approved the following British Rail investment projects:

100 Class 60 diesel locomotives for freight
200 Class 319/321 electric multiple unit (EMU) coaches for NSE
128 Class 158 Sprinter Express diesel multiple unit (DMU) coaches for Regional Railways
77 Class 165 Networker DMU coaches for Chiltern line
Cambridge-Kings Lynn electrification and 28 EMU coaches
124 Class 321 EMU coaches for NSE
31 additional Mk IV coaches for East Coast Main Line
Manchester Airport rail Link and 6 DMU coaches
400 class 465 Networker EMU coaches for SE London and NW Kent
103 Class 165 Networker DMU coaches for Thames and Chiltern lines
Intercapitals passenger trains for Channel Tunnel services
Birmingham Cross city electrification
700 container wagons for Railfreight Distribution
30 Class 92 electric locomotives for Channel Tunnel freight
Tonbridge-Redhill electrification
Waterloo international terminal and North Pole maintenance depot
Chislehurst-Folkestone resignalling
69 Class 159 DMU coaches for Waterloo-Exeter
Hooton-Chester-Ellesmere Port electrification
65 Class 165 Networker DMU coaches for Paddington services
86 Class 466 Networker EMU coaches for SE London and NW Kent

The appointment of contractors and consultants for investment projects is a matter for BR.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Offices, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* increase staffing levels in his Department's offices covering the Doncaster area; and if he will show in his answer the grades in both *(a)* and *(b)* that will be affected.

Miss Widdecombe: Staffing levels in the Department's offices covering the Doncaster area is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to alter the operations, or reduce workloads, of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area.

Miss Widdecombe: The operations and workloads of the Department's offices in the Doncaster area is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Information Technology Services Agency; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs;

(2) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Resettlement Agency; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs;

(3) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Benefits Agency; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs;

(4) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Contributions Agency; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Miss Widdecombe: The 1991-92 annual budgets initially allocated to the Department's four agencies are in the table. Allocations differentiate between capital and running costs but the latter are not split between staff and non-staff costs. It is for agency chief executives to determine, within the framework of Government accounting, how their administration budget is actually spent and this includes flexibility to vary the amounts spent on staff and other running costs.

Agency	*Initial budget (£ million)*
Information Technology Services Agency	406·566
Resettlement Agency	25·959
Benefits Agency	1,707·336
Contributions Agency	111·493

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the computer consultancy companies currently employed by the Information Technology Services Agency, together with the purpose of each contract, total cost of each contract and number of non-civil servants employed in each contract.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of the Information Technology Services Agency is a matter for Mr. John Kenworthy, the agency chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 1 May, *Official Report*, column *254*, on the overpayments recovery guide and column *255*, on deductions from income support, when the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East might expect replies from the Benefits Agency; whether it will be normal practice for the agency to reply on the same date for which a question was tabled for answer; whether the agency will contact Members to explain the delay in cases where a question is not answered on that date; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that replies were sent to the hon. Member on 8 and 10 May respectively. Replies should normally reach the hon. Member concerned within a day of the question being answered. The chief executive will be writing to the hon. Member about the delay which occurred in replying to the two questions to which he refers.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cold weather payments were claimed and made in each month from January to April 1991; and how many claims were outstanding at the end of each month.

Mr. Scott: The information will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Local Offices, Scotland

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to visit the local offices of his Department in Stranraer, Greenock and Port Glasgow to assess the effectiveness and efficiency with which the offices deal with claims; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has no plans to do so, but my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has recently visited other offices in the Glasgow area. All three offices are meeting delivery and accuracy targets for benefits administered locally.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present value of the adjustments to means-tested benefit levels referred to in paragraph 3.7 of the consultation paper entitled "A New Tax for Local Government".

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Oldham West (Mr. Meacher) on Friday 3 May 1991 at column *351*.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of *(a)* increasing the personal allowances for income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit by 60p for a single person over 18 years and £1·20 for a couple, *(b)* reducing the taper for rent rebates and allowances from 65 to 60 per cent. and *(c)* making both these changes.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates suggest that these measures would cost *(a)* £210 million, *(b)* £90 million, and *(c)* £300 million in Great Britain in 1991-92. *Source:* Modelled using data drawn from the 1986/7/8 family expenditure surveys and the 1989 annual statistical survey.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have now opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme at the latest convenient date; what was his Department's main working assumption as to the numbers by that date; what has been the total cost of encouraging people to opt out of the scheme, at the latest convenient date; what was his Department's main working assumption of the cost by that date; what would be the implications for national insurance contributions from 1993 per person to meet the cost of these general incentives; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 6 March 1991 at columns *170-71*. It was not possible to estimate in advance the numbers who would choose to opt out of SERPS or the revenue likely to be forgone by the NI fund. The cost of incentive payments has been absorbed by the NI fund and it is expected that this will continue to be the case until 1992-93, the last year for which incentive payments will be made under existing legislation.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total cost to the national

insurance fund in the financial year 1991-92 and in a full year of the 2 per cent. banded earnings offered as an incentive to opt out of SERPs, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to the reply, 2 May 1991, c. 330]:* The estimate of the reduction in gross public expenditure of £2 billion a year in 2010, rising to £14 billion a year in 2035 refers to estimates of the effects of the changes in SERPs contained in the 1986 Social Security Act, at 1990 prices, as given in reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 26 July 1990, column *486*, and not to the effect of encouraging people to take out personal and occupational pensions.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assumptions were made, for the purposes of his answers to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 2 May, *Official Report*, column *330*, as to the future rates of contracted-out rebates, the ages at which members of personal and money-purchase occupational schemes would resume full contributions to the state scheme and the numbers who would do so;

(2) what assumptions as to numbers contracted out and contributing to personal pension schemes in each year were made in arriving at the estimated reductions in gross public expenditure in 2010 and 2035 given in his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 2 May, *Official Report*, column *330;* how much of the reduction relates to personal pension schemes, money-purchase occupational schemes and other occupational schemes; what would be the net reduction, taking account of contributions forgone; and what would be the gross and net reductions if those assumed to commence contributing to personal and other money-purchase schemes after 1991-92 continued paying full contributions to the state scheme instead.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) today.

Tax Withdrawal Rates

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing for 1991-92 (i) the number of working heads, (ii) dependants and (iii) families with children facing marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rates in excess of 40 per cent., in the manner of his answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *249*.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The information is in the table:

Combined marginal deduction rates 1991-92 benefit units where at least one parent works full time (000)
Great Britain

Per cent.	*Families with children*	*Couples and single people*	*Total*
100	0	0	0
90 to 99	50	0	50
80 to 89	130	20	150
70 to 79	140	50	190
60 to 69	0	5	5
50 to 59	0	0	0
40 to 49	10	20	30

Notes:
Projection based on 1986, 1987 and 1988 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1991-92 prices, taxes and benefits.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of reducing the deduction for tariff income under the housing benefit and community charge benefit schemes from £1 to 50p for every £250 or part thereof of capital, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The latest available estimates suggest that the cost in 1991-92 would be around £90 million for Great Britain. Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 family expenditure surveys.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 663, regarding the current cost of exempting all those people on income support from paying 20 per cent. of the poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 8 May 1991]:* To exempt all people on income support from paying 20 per cent. of the community charge, without changing the benefit position of people with incomes above income support levels, would now cost around an estimated £200 million in 1991-92. This estimate assumes that no reductions are made in the income-related benefit levels which were adjusted in April 1989 to include help towards the 20 per cent. contribution at an estimated cost of £500 million.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from 1986, 1987 and 1988 family expenditure surveys.

EMPLOYMENT

Repetitive Work

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many improvement notices and how many prohibition notices have been issued by health and safety inspectors in each year since 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989 in relation to workplace health and safety problems associated with repetitive work.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not readily available centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his plans to publicise the risks and remedies in relation to musculo-skeletal disorders which are associated with repetitive work.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive is currently undertaking a major publicity initiative on musculo-skeletal disorders at work. It has recently published a booklet "Work Related Upper Limb Disorders—a guide to prevention" which gives advice on the prevention of

musculo-skeletal disorders caused by work activities, and in August this year will be launching a year long campaign aimed at raising the awareness of musculo-skeletal injuries and their prevention.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show for *(a)* full-time workers, *(b)* part-time workers and *(c)* all workers (i) the number and (ii) the percentage earning less than £130 for (1) women, (2) men and (3) all workers, excluding overtime pay in (x) Scotland, (y) the regions of Scotland and (z) Great Britain.

Mr. Jackson: For Scotland and the regions of Scotland, the information requested is available only for full-time employees. For Great Britain, figures are also available for part-time employees and all—full-time and part-time employees.

The figures from the new earnings survey are given in the tables.

April 1990

Full time employees on adult rates with weekly earnings excluding overtime less than £130	*Number in the sample*			*Percentage of total*		
	Women	*Men*	*Total*	*Women*	*Men*	*Total*
Scotland	1,205	719	1,924	28·6	9·7	16·6
Borders	49	16	65	59·8	[1]—	33·2
Central	74	29	103	35·1	7·6	17·3
Dumfries and Galloway	39	24	63	40·6	11·4	20·6
Fife	80	39	119	32·3	9·2	17·8
Grampian	115	72	187	31·3	7·9	14·6
Highland	48	27	75	32·4	11·0	19·1
Lothian	175	120	295	21·5	9·2	13·9
Strathclyde	497	311	808	27·0	9·8	16·1
Tayside	118	72	190	32·5	12·8	20·5
Islands	10	9	19	[1]—	11·7	17·0
Highland and Islands	58	36	94	31·7	11·2	18·6
Great Britain	10,056	6,308	16,364	23·0	7·6	13·0

[1]Sampling error too large or numbers too small for reliable estimates.

Part time employees on adult rates with weekly earnings excluding overtime less than £130	*Number in the sample*			*Percentage of total*		
	Women	*Men*	*Total*	*Women*	*Men*	*Total*
Great Britain	22,763	3,117	25,880	89·8	85·0	89·2

All employees on adult rates with weekly earnings excluding overtime less than £130	*Number in the sample*			*Percentage of total*		
	Women	*Men*	*Total*	*Women*	*Men*	*Total*
Great Britain	32,819	9,425	42,244	47·6	10·9	27·2

Source: New Earnings Survey 1990.
Note:
The survey excludes significant numbers of part-time employees with low weekly earnings.

Footwear and Textile Industries

38. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the footwear and textile industries in each month since September 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The number of employees in employment in the footwear and textile industries in Great Britain were as follows:

Thousands unadjusted for seasonal variations

	Footwear SIC Group 451	*Textile SIC Class 43*
1990		
September	44·5	190·4
October	44·6	193·8
November	44·3	193·3
December	44·1	188·2
1991		
January	44·2	185·0
February	44·1	185·6

Health and Safety Legislation

39. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation covering health and safety in the agricultural industry for the *(a)* distance from private housing, *(b)* distance from public highways and footpaths and *(c)* size and height, of bales or wheels of straw and hay stored in open fields.

Mr. Forth: I have no current intentions of doing so. The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcing the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which applies to agricultural undertakings. The HSE recommends that stacks should always be placed at a reasonable distance from property and roads to minimise potential risks. The HSE has produced a guidance booklet "The Killing Fields" which deals with the siting and stacking of bales in relation to other fire hazards.

Existing general duties and enforcement powers under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 are considered adequate to deal with any problems that may arise on this matter.

Geomagnetic Survey

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the funding of the geomagnetic survey and its contribution to North sea safety.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive is contributing up to a maximum of £475,000 over a five-year period towards the funding of the geomagnetic survey being undertaken by the British Geological Survey. This contribution will assist in enhancing the safety of offshore drilling.

Employment Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Employment Service; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fodgen, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Factory Fire, Mansfield Woodhouse

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment the Health and Safety Executive has made of the dangers posed to the health of local people of Mansfield Woodhouse from the fumes from the fire at a plastics factory on 6 May.

Mr. Forth: As this fire was not reportable to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Incidents, diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985, the HSE is not carrying out an investigation. However based on its knowledge of the factory, the HSE has advised the emergency services and other official bodies involved that the health of the people of Mansfield Woodhouse is unlikely to have been put at risk by the fumes from the fire.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Heart Surgery

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients in Northern Ireland are at present awaiting heart surgery.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 901 as at 31 December 1990.

Gynaecological Services, Belfast

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many admissions for gynaecology were recorded at *(a)* the Royal Victoria hospital, Belfast, *(b)* the Mater hospital, Belfast and *(c)* the Belfast city hospital during 1989.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not held in precisely the format requested. The data held relate to discharges rather than admissions.

The numbers of in-patient discharges (including deaths) in gynaecology were as follows:

	1989
RVH	1,604
Mater Hospital	795
Belfast City Hospital	2,435

Rate Collection Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Rate Collection Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Needham: The budget for the Rate Collection Agency for 1991-92 is £5·925 million of which £4·83 million—81·5 per cent.—relates to running costs of the agency.

Training and Employment Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Training and Employment Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Needham: The approved 1991-92 main estimates provision for the Training and Employment Agency is £172 million of which almost 15 per cent. is allocated to staff costs.

Deaf People

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaf people are registered in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: There is no statutory register of deaf people in Northern Ireland. The number of deaf people in contact with the health and social services boards during year ending 31 March 1990 was 1,120.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaf people in Northern Ireland are in receipt of attendance allowance in each age bracket *(a)* under 10 years, *(b)* 10 to 18 years, *(c)* 18 to 65 years and *(d)* over 65 years.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Inter-party Talks

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what location will the third strand of the Northern Ireland talks relating to the British and Irish relationship be held.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities, travelling allowances, and daily allowances are paid to those participating in the inter-party talks at Parliament buildings, Stormont.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Each party has been provided with a suite of three offices consisting of one for the party leader, one for delegates and a fully equipped office. Delegates are entitled to claim travel and subsistence allowances at normal civil service rates in respect of days when talks take place. A daily allowance of £78·50 is payable to those delegates who lose earnings or incur additional business overheads because of their attendance at the talks.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons from each political

party qualify for allowances and expenses in connection with the inter-party talks at Parliament buildings, Stormont.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* Each of the four parties has accredited a delegation of 10 persons who are entitled to claim allowances and expenses. In addition, up to three members of each party's support staff may claim travel and subsistence allowance at normal civil service rates.

HEALTH

National Health Service Trusts

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further progress he can report on the establishment of self-governing hospital trusts.

Mr. Waldegrave: Fifty-seven trusts became operational on 1 April this year. In total, 130 expressions of interest have been received for trust status for April 1992, of which 88, as at close 13 May, have so far submitted applications.

16. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to name the chairmen or chairwomen-designate for the second wave of national health service trusts.

18. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to appoint chairpersons-designate for the second wave of national health service trust hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No national health service chairpersons or non-executive directors can be formally appointed until an NHS trust is established. Our current programme for second wave NHS trusts envisages formal establishment in the autumn of this year, the names of the chairpersons will be provided around the same time.

20. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has made any assessment of possible job losses as a result of national health service trust applications for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. Trust applications discuss service developments and their consequences in broad terms only.

21. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct the management of the national health service to cease all progress towards the establishment of trust hospitals pending a full inquiry into the business plans of those trusts so far constituted; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no intention of stopping the establishment of national health service trusts. We are greatly encouraged that 57 trusts have already been established; and that we have received approximately 130 expressions of interest in the second wave.

27. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assumptions he made about the future activity levels of national health service trusts in reaching his decisions on trust status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: When reaching a decision about whether each hospital or unit was suitable for trust status my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considered its application against four criteria. Each trust gained approval by demonstrating that: it would deliver benefits and quality of service to its patients; had effective leadership and management; key professional staff, especially clinicians, would be involved in management; and it would be financially viable.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals within Wessex region which have applied for trust status under the first and second phases of the trust programme, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Applications in the first wave which were approved and became operational on 1 April 1991 are as follows:

The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Trust
West Dorset Mental Health NHS Trust
The West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust
West Dorset Community Health NHS Trust

Second wave expressions of interest have been received from:

Bath and District (Mental Health Unit)
Bournemouth and Christchurch Acute Unit
Poole Acute Unit
East Dorset Community Services
Royal United Hospital, Bath
Wiltshire Healthcare (Bath and Wiltshire Community Unit)
Avon and Somerset Community Unit

Formal applications for NHS trust status have now been submitted from all the above.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology

14. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that hon. Members are given the opportunity to debate the draft code of practice to be adopted by the Human Fertilisation Embryology Authority before he takes a decision on whether to approve it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The question of a debate at this stage is a matter for the Leader of the House. In any event, hon. Members have the opportunity to comment on the draft code of practice, copies of which are available in the Vote Office.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

15. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will add myalgic encephalomyelitis to the list of notifiable diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No. The main considerations for making an infectious disease notifiable are that it should be capable of clear diagnosis, and intervention to limit its spread should be feasible. At present, myalgic encephalomyelitis does not meet these criteria.

GPs (Computers)

17. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent by general practitioners on computers over the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: Information in the form requested is not available. However, a scheme to encourage the development of GP computing, by reimbursing GPs a

proportion of their costs, was introduced from 1 April 1989. An estimated £17 million was reimbursed in the period to 31 March 1991 and a further £19 million is available in 1991-92. In the period from January 1988 to March 1990 the number of computerised practices increased from 9·8 to 47·5 per cent.

NHS Salaries

19. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of current national health service expenditure is accounted for by salaries and wages.

Mr. Dorrell: The summarised accounts of regional and district health authorities in England for 1989-90—the latest year available—shows that salaries and wages costs accounted for some 75·6 per cent. of the total revenue expenditure.

NHS Funding

22. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on the national health service in 1979, and how much this year.

Mr. Dorrell: This year expenditure on the national health service in England is expected to be some £26·6 billion, a real-terms increase of 51 per cent. over the 1978-79 figure of £6·5 billion.

26. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current proportion of gross domestic product that is being spent on health; and what the comparable figure was in 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Total United Kingdom national health service spending as a proportion of GDP was 5·2 per cent. in 1989 compared with 4·7 per cent. in 1979.

Nottingham Health Authority

23. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure of the Nottingham health authority in 1978-79 and in 1990-91 in real terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Nottingham health authority was established on 1 April 1982. Between 1982-83 and 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, revenue expenditure increased from £113·1 million—cash—to £184·3 million—cash—and capital expenditure from £6·6 million—cash—to £15·3 million—cash. These represent increases in real terms of 13 per cent. for revenue and 59·9 per cent. for capital, measured at 1989-90 prices.

Day Care Centres

24. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities charge for attendance at day care centres.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: During the year 1988-89, the latest for which records are available, 84 local authorities were charging for attendance at day care centres. These centres include family centres, day centres, social clubs and adult training centres.

Competitive Tendering

25. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total annual savings for domestic cleaning, catering and laundry services, covered by the national competitive tendering initiative for the national health service since their inception.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Total annual savings achieved since the introduction of the Government's competitive tendering initiative for these three services is estimated to be in the order of £120 million.

Health Inequalities

28. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce targets for the reduction of inequalities in health between social classes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A forthcoming consultation document will set out proposals for the development of health targets covering the whole population in England. The counties of the rest of the United Kingdom either have or are developing their own strategies, which include health targets.

Bristol NHS Trust

29. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future funding of Bristol united hospital national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The United Bristol Healthcare national health service trust, like all other trusts and directly managed units, obtains its income from contracts to provide health services to health authorities and GP fund holders who purchase such services on behalf of their residents.

The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Thomas Durie, the chairman of the trust, for details.

Children Act 1989

30. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to ensure that there has been sufficient preparation for the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on 13 May at columns *33-35*.

South Yorkshire Ambulance Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current establishment by rank for the South Yorkshire ambulance service; what is the number of vacancies in each rank; and what were the comparable figures 10 years ago.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority for details.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current number of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency ambulance vehicles in the ownership of the South Yorkshire ambulance service; and what were the figures for 10 years ago.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally in exactly the form requested. The table shows the number of vehicles, by type, owned by the South Yorkshire metropolitan ambulance service in 1985-86 and 1988-89. These are the earliest and latest years for which this information is available.

Ambulance service vehicles for Yorkshire ambulance service

	Year	
	1985-86	*1988-89*
Ambulances		
Two-trolley Emergency	131	12
Two-trolley Dual Purpose	95	187
Sitting case seats only (under 14)	102	31
Sitting case stretcher capacity	—	—
Sitting case seats plus lift mechanism	—	128
Car (with or without stretcher capacity)	28	23
Bus—14 or more seats with or without stretcher or wheelchair capacity	—	—
Total ambulance service vehicles used to transport patients	356	381
Other Ambulance Services Vehicles		
Major incident vehicles—radio and/or equipment vehicles (trailers, caravans, etc.)	3	3
Recovery vehicles (Land Rover type or converted ambulance)	1	3
Other ambulance service vehicles	18	25
Total other ambulance service vehicles	22	31
Total ambulance service vehicles	378	412

Source: National ambulance service surveys district finance department, York health authority.

Doncaster Health Authority (Loans)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by each quarter for the financial year 1990-91, and for the first quarter 1991-92, the loans he has authorised or made to Doncaster health authority; and if he will state over what period.

Mr. Dorrell: No such loans have been made during the periods specified.

World Health Organisation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the annual meeting of the World Health Organisation in Geneva.

Mr. Dorrell: The world health assembly closes on 17 May. I will write to the hon. Member soon afterwards.

Children in Care

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each year since 1979, how many children in England were in care where the specific cause was homelessness.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of children in voluntary care under section 2 of the Child Care Act 1980 in England for the years ending 31 March 1979 to 31 March 1989 where the specific cause was family homelessness is given in the table.

Children in care under section 2 of the Child Care Act 1980 where the specific cause was family homelessness England, 1979-1989[1]

At 31 March	*Number in care under S2 Child Care Act 1980 where family homelessness was the specific cause*
1979	1,379
1980	1,308
1981	1,115
1982	981
1983	825
1984	713
1985	604
1986	519
1987	408
1988	346
1989[1]	304

[1] 1989 figures are provisional.

Triazolam

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to withdraw from sale in Britain the sleeping pill triazolam following recent studies on the drug and its side effects.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Committee on Safety of Medicines—CSM—has been asked to examine the new evidence in relation to the drug triazolam. This follows the recent publication of results from a study carried out in the United States of America involving higher doses than those recommended for use in the United Kingdom. The Committee on Safety of Medicines will advise the licensing authority if any action is required.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the manufacturers of benzodiazepines about their addictive characteristics.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The problem of addiction with benzodiazepines has been recognised for a number of years. The Committee on Safety of Medicines recommended restrictions on the use of these substances in order to reduce the risk of dependence associated with their use. These recommendations have been communicated to manufacturers of licensed medicinal products containing a benzodiazepine and appropriate statements are incorporated in product particulars.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the labelling of benzodiazepines will be amended to include information on the side-effects and withdrawal symptoms caused by the drugs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. and learned Freind the then Minister for Health gave him on 24 April 1989 at column *381*.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the expenditure per head on benzodiapezines in each national health service region for the most recent available period within the prescribing analyses and costs data system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Cost (thousands) £	List size	Cost per head £
Northern RHA	339,342	3,181,402	0·11
Yorkshire RHA	387,335	3,793,708	0·10
Trent RHA	398,875	4,875,982	0·08
East Anglia RHA	152,008	2,084,700	0·07
North West Thames RHA	249,600	4,137,667	0·06
North East Thames RHA	248,703	4,254,350	0·06
South East Thames RHA	298,234	4,052,797	0·07
South West Thames RHA	258,328	3,222,530	0·08
Wessex RHA	252,943	3,012,328	0·08
Oxford RHA	174,731	2,663,876	0·07
South Western RHA	322,435	3,587,414	0·09
West Midlands RHA	402,830	5,468,708	0·07
Mersey RHA	255,100	2,524,886	0·10
North Western RHA	536,543	4,157,513	0·13

Note:

For PACT purposes every FHSA within each region is permanently allocated to one of three quarterly processing cycles. The information provided is based on data relating to the following PACT periods:

*October 1990—December 1990
*November 1990—January 1991
*December 1990—February 1991

NHS (Gulf War Costs)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional costs were incurred by the national health service in 1990-91 as a result of the Gulf war.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 23 April at column *397*.

Child Abuse

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the impact of the Children Act on the way in which child abuse cases are dealt with.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) earlier today.

NHS Estates

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the 1991-92 annual budget for NHS Estates; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Dorrell: This is an operational matter and I have asked the chief executive of NHS Estates to write to the hon. Member.

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical assistance has been sought by Kuwait and other nations in the Gulf regions to help people with asthma and other breathing disorders suffering from oil fire-polluted air from the burning Kuwait oil fields; and what assistance has been given.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received no direct request from any country in the Gulf region. The World Health Organisation, however, is co-ordinating advice and assistance from a number of countries including the United Kingdom in handling potential medical problems arising from oil fires in Kuwait. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, is currently visiting Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to visit Kuwait at the end of this month. These visits will enable the Government to assess whether any additional assistance is required.

Bexley Health Authority

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about the funding of Bexley health authority;

(2) what representations he has received about the funding of Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State on 7 November 1989 and a group of consultants at Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 16 April 1991.

Value Added Medical Products

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support he intends to give those doctors who are holding Value Added Medical Products to the contracts it signed with them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The arrangements between general practitioners and Value Added Medical Products are private commercial transactions.

Erith and District Hospital

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the future development of Erith and District general hospital.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since the reply that my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend on 9 March 1990 at column *901*, a letter has been received from Bexley community health council and I met the chairman of Bexley district health authority on 31 August 1990.

Calcium Supplements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table, using PACT data, to show the average expenditure per head on general practitioner prescribed calcium supplements in each regional health authority area for the most recent available period.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The information requested is as follows.

Regional health authority	Cost (£ thousands)	List size	Cost per head (£)
Northern	101,022	3,181,402	0·03
Yorkshire	88,777	3,793,708	0·02
Trent	137,619	4,875,982	0·03
East Anglia	47,045	2,084,700	0·02
North West Thames	102,037	4,137,667	0·02
North East Thames	85,277	4,254,350	0·02
South East Thames	87,379	4,052,797	0·02
South West Thames	88,080	3,222,530	0·03
Wessex	72,937	3,012,328	0·02
Oxford	50,556	2,663,876	0·02

Regional health authority	Cost (£ thousands)	List size	Cost per head (£)
South Western	107,547	3,587,414	0·03
West Midlands	146,726	5,468,708	0·03
Mersey	78,575	2,524,886	0·03
North Western	123,458	4,157,513	0·03

Note: For PACT purposes every FHSA within each Region is permanently allocated to one of three quarterly processing cycles. The information provided is based on data relating to the following PACT periods:
October 1990 to December 1990
November 1990 to January 1991
December 1990 to February 1991

DEFENCE

RAF Community Relations Officers

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the date when the appointment of an RAF community relations officer for the Highlands and Islands will take place.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As the Government reply—HC 659/90—to the report on low flying by the Defence Committee last year made clear, it is planned to establish three RAF regional community relations officers in southern Scotland/the Borders, the Lake District and in Wales on a trial basis. If this scheme should prove to be a success, the affordability of extending it to other areas will be considered.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the duties assigned to RAF community relations officers in Wales, the Lake District and the Borders.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The introduction of RAF regional community relations officers in southern Scotland/the Borders, the Lake District and in Wales is intended to improve the presentation of low flying in areas remote from RAF stations; to improve liaison with members of the public and organisations such as Riding for the Disabled, schools, national parks, wildlife reserves, regional farmers organisations and other local bodies and to enable information on the low-flying system to be distributed more widely.

Low Flying

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what means local authorities can have areas under their jurisdiction designated as avoidance areas for low-flying training purposes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Requests that low-flying military aircraft should avoid a particular location should be made direct to my Department giving a full justification. Each case is considered on its merits, but bearing in mind the considerations set out in the Government's reply—HC 659/90 page v—to the Defence Committee's report on low flying last year.

Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what support he has received within the European Community intergovernmental conference for his rapid reaction force proposals: and if he will make a statement,

(2) whether he will give further details of his concept of a rapid reaction force under the auspices of the Western European Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of moves towards a stronger European contribution to collective defence, which the United Kingdom supports, western European nations are discussing the idea of a European reaction force, able to operate autonomously outside the NATO area to complement the Atlantic alliance's role in defence of NATO territory. It would draw units from the NATO integrated military structure, and from national forces.

Meteorological Office

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Meteorological Office is being examined as a candidate for privatisation.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In line with Government policy on "next steps", the option of privatisation was considered before the Meteorological Office was established as an agency. It is the intention, as with other parts of the defence support area, to extend the market testing of Meteorological Office support services. There are no current plans to privatise the office.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Meterological Office; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Meteorological Office, under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the Meteorological Office, Dr. J. T. Houghton, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, CBDE, under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the CBDE, Dr. G. S. Pearson to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Defence Research Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Defence Research Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the DRA, Mr. Nigel Hughes, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Directorate General of Defence Accounts

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Directorate General of Defence Accounts; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Directorate General of Defence Accounts, DGDA, under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the DGDA, Mr. M. J. Dymond, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Hydrographic Office

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Hydrographic Office; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Hydrographic Office. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Military Survey

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Military Survey; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chief executive of Military Survey. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

RAF Maintenance

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for RAF Maintenance; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chief executive of the RAF Maintenance Group. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Service Children's Schools (North-West Europe)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Service Children's Schools (North-West Europe); and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chief executive of Service Children's Schools (North-West Europe). I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Army explosive ordnance disposal team are currently working in *(a)* Kuwait, *(b)* southern Iraq and *(c)* Kurdish Iraq; and how long the team is expected to continue in the region.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 10 explosive ordnance disposal—EOD—personnel in Kuwait, none in southern Iraq and nine in northern Iraq. In addition, there are two in Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia. An advance party of 21 EOD squadron arrives in Saudi Arabia today with the remainder, up to a total of 200, arriving a week later. They will move to Kuwait after acclimatisation. These deployments are likely to be of varying lengths, but are not expected to exceed four months.

Naval Procurement (Anglo-French Co-operation)

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Anglo-French naval procurement co-operation.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We place importance on Anglo-French equipment co-operation and continue to explore opportunities for collaboration. The United Kingdom is collaborating with France, Spain and Italy in the project definition phase of the family of anti-air missile systems to meet the air defence requirements of the replacement ship for the type 42 frigate. Joint discussions with France are currently taking place about the possibility of collaboration on the ship and its systems.

Military Risks, Wales

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the risk posed to Welsh civilians and tourists from military training, testing and storage facilities in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All reasonable measures are taken to ensure that the risk to the general public from every kind of military activity is kept to a minimum.

Operation Safe Haven

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average flying time of one relief flight of *(a)* a Hercules and *(b)* Chinook involved in Operation Safe Haven.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The duration of both C-130 Hercules and Chinook sorties has varied considerably depending upon the location to which supplies are being delivered and the nature of the task being undertaken. Between 8 and 30 April, C-130 Hercules aircraft flew 58 airdrop sorties, accumulating about 240 flying hours—giving an average flight time of just over 4 hours. Up to 29 April, Chinook helicopters had flown 231 sorties on relief operations, accumulating over 400 flying hours—giving an average flight time of about one hour 45 minutes.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost so far of building and supplying camps for Kurdish refugees under Operation Safe Haven; and from what votes the cost is being funded.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Along with other allied troops, British Army engineers have been erecting tents, laying on water supplies and providing sanitation for camps, including at Zakho and Al Amadiyah. The cost will be shared between defence and ODA votes. An estimate of the cost is not yet available, but the additional costs involved are unlikely to be significant.

Kurdistan and Bangladesh

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any of the costs of Ministry of Defence assistance in humanitarian relief in Kurdistan and Bangladesh will be attributed to the Ministry of Defence's training budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As the Department responsible for providing United Kingdom Government aid, the ODA refunds any additional costs which MOD incurs as a direct result of providing such assistance. All other costs lie where they normally fall on defence votes.

Bangladesh

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has of the cost of sending the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, Fort Grange, and two Sea King helicopters to Bangladesh; and from what votes this is being funded.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The initial estimate of the additional cost of deploying RFA Fort Grange to Bangladesh, complete with four Sea King helicopters, is currently about £250,000. This cost will be met by the Overseas Development Administration.

Rolls-Royce (Leavesden)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what value was put on the Leavesden site by the district valuer before it was sold to Rolls-Royce;

(2) whether his Department was aware that Rolls-Royce intended to close its Leavesden factory and redevelop the site before the factory and its site were sold to Rolls-Royce;

(3) how much was paid by Rolls-Royce for the Leavesden site.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The details of the sale of the Leavesden site to Rolls-Royce are commercial-in-confidence. Although we did not know in advance that Rolls-Royce intended to close its Leavesden factory, we were aware that it wished to rationalise its operations on the site and our arrangements for sale took account of this.

SCOTLAND

Agricultural Land (Ownership)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of agricultural land in Scotland is owned by overseas investors; and if he will list *(a)* the countries concerned and *(b)* the percentage of land owned by each.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Statistics on overseas ownership of agricultural land are not available.

Seed Potatoes

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the two recent successful prosecutions under the Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984 and 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In December 1988 at Forfar sheriff court a firm of Scottish seed potato merchants admitted to a breach of regulation 6(1) of the Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984 after marketing seed potatoes which were neither basic nor certified seed potatoes. The firm was fined £1,000. In July 1989 at Perth sheriff court a Scottish seed potato producer was similarly prosecuted. The court found the firm guilty, but was unable to impose a penalty because of a legal technicality, the notice of penalty not having been served on the accused.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures of the production of seed potatoes in Scotland for *(a)* the estimated crop tonnage, *(b)* the actual crop tonnage, *(c)* the crop average under the seed potato classification and labelling schemes and *(d)* the number of labels printed and issued for each year over the past 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The crop average under the seed potato classification and labelling schemes in each of the last 10 years is 25 to 30 tonnes per hectare.

Producers are required to apply for labels against the volume of seed potatoes they expect to sell. The table sets out the total annual tonnage and the corresponding total number of labels printed and issued for individual consignments within the total tonnage.

	000 tonnes	*Number of labels*
1981	375	—
1982	375	—
1983	329	—
1984	392	—
1985	344	—
1986	333	6,674,055
1987	291	4,819,952
1988	274	4,507,481
1989	287	4,675,456
1990	[1]227	[2]3,191,642

[1] Provisional.
[2] To date.

Records in respect of labels for the period 1981-85 are no longer available. Figures relating to the estimated and actual crop tonnages are not held centrally.

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tenants have applied to join the rents-to-mortgages scheme; what has been the cost of the counselling arrangements for them; and who is paying for those arrangements.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: More than 20,000 tenants have expressed an interest in Scottish Homes' pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme. From the introduction of the limited pilot scheme in October 1989 until 31 March 1991 a total of 228 formal applications have been submitted by tenants of Scottish Homes and the new town development corporations. Since the extension of the pilot scheme to local authority tenants from 1 April 1991, a total of 119 formal applications have already been made. In the first instance, more than 1,400 tenants have received or will shortly receive counselling to help them to decide whether to proceed to make a formal application. The responsibility for the counselling arrangements and their cost rests with Scottish Homes.

Expenditure

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure expressed (1) at 1989-90 prices and (2) as a percentage of the Scottish gross domestic product by him in each year since 1978.

Mr. Lang: The figures are in the table:

Expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility[1]

£ million

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Actual	3,712	4,552	5,383	5,839	6,509	6,845
In 1989-90 prices[2]	8,691	9,134	9,128	9,029	9,398	9,446
As percentage of Scottish GDP[3]	29·12	31·29	32·31	31·92	32·56	31·27

£ million

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Actual	6,994	7,167	7,513	7,805	8,458	8,919	9,725
In 1989-90 prices	9,185	8,928	9,045	8,921	8,997	8,919	9,026
As percentage of Scottish GDP[3]	30·68	28·71	27·51	26·52	25·61	24·96	n.a.

[1] No direct comparison can be made with the years from 1978-79 to 1983-84 because of the changes in the definition of the Planning Total announced in Cm. 441. An estimate of expenditure for 1978-79 on the new planning total basis was given in the answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on 30 October 1990. In addition, changes in my responsibility are not necessarily reflected in the figures.

[2]Using the GDP deflator at market prices adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.
[3]Estimates of the Scottish gross domestic product (GDP) are only available by calendar year. The figures are expenditure for the financial year as a proportion of the Scottish GDP for the calendar year of which it forms a major part. Scottish GDP figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table, comparable to that on page 231 of the "Commentary of the Scotland Programme 1992-93", on expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility in real terms, beginning in 1978-79 and taking account of the expenditure plans laid out in "Serving Scotland's Needs," Cm. 1515.

Mr. Lang: The information is shown in the table.

Expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility in real terms[1]

£ million

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	185	243	261	234	219	226	240	252
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	197	201	205	193	634	407	338	354
Tourism	14	14	14	14	16	15	13	11
Transport	705	696	660	694	693	680	335	375
Housing	1,358	1,473	1,324	1,110	993	989	688	645
Other Environmental Services	730	791	748	722	705	734	263	255
Law, Order and Protective Services	454	492	521	554	576	622	370	376
Education	2,283	2,276	2,350	2,406	2,366	2,367	359	377
Arts and Libraries	80	74	93	96	92	88	26	27
Health	2,402	2,474	2,642	2,736	2,762	2,372	2,420	2,434
Social Work[2]	—	—	—	—	—	435	43	41
Other Public Services	126	120	125	124	113	123	121	125
Central Government Grants:								
Revenue Support Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rate Support Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,179	2,064
Community Charge Transitional Relief	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rate Rebates	—	—	—	—	—	—	24	49
Non-Domestic Rates	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,274	1,274
Nationalised Industries External Financing Limits	155	283	185	147	230	382	494	289
Total	8,691	9,134	9,128	9,029	9,398	9,446	9,185	8,928

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	213	194	194	197	210	216	220	220
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	394	280	255	224	236	457	450	420
Tourism	11	10	11	11	11	11	10	10
Transport	343	328	241	342	357	330	320	320
Housing	672	741	621	609	613	619	580	590
Other Environmental Services	259	273	281	289	293	316	340	350
Law, Order and Protective Services	397	423	441	472	486	492	480	490
Education	392	387	390	390	429	480	490	490
Arts and Libraries	31	30	30	29	32	36	40	40
Health	2,493	2,569	2,660	2,721	2,775	2,848	2,860	2,860
Social Work[2]	30	31	33	37	37	49	50	50
Other Public Services	126	127	124	126	131	138	140	140
Central Government Grants:								
Revenue Support Grant	—	—	—	2,244	2,316	2,299	3,430	3,390
Rate Support Grant	2,062	1,952	2,135	102	—	—	—	—
Community Charge Transitional Relief	—	—	—	—	41	22	40	20
Rates Rebates	43	37	29	25	30	27	—	—
Non-Domestic Rates	1,334	1,415	1,372	1,219	1,103	1,205	—	—
Nationalised Industries External Financing Limits	283	157	135	−103	−83	43	40	10
Total	9,045	8,921	8,997	8,919	9,026	9,586	9,510	9,420

[1] Base year 1989-90 using the GDP deflator at market prices adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.
[2] Health and Social Work figures not held separately prior to 1983-84.
Note: No direct comparison can be made with the years from 1978-79 to 1983-84 because of the changes in the definition of the Planning Total announced in Cm 441.
An estimate of expenditure for 1978-79 on the new planning total basis was given to the hon. Member on 30 October 1990. In addition, changes in my responsibilities are not necessarily reflected in the figures.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Lang: The tables show, as at 1 July 1990, appointments expiring in 1991—table 1—and 1992—table 2—for each executive and advisory body and tribunal for which I have responsibility, with the title of the post and the salary, if any. The duration of future appointments is decided at the time of the renewal. Since July I have

appointed a chairman and 11 members to the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland until 31 March 1992 when Scottish Natural Heritage is due to come into being.

Table 1
Appointments expiring in 1991

Rank	*Remuneration as at 1 July 1990* £
Advisory Committee on Dental Establishments	
1 Member	0
Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
10 Members	0
Ancient Monuments for Scotland	
Chairman	0
4 Members	0
Argyll and Clyde Health Board	
Chairman	16,005
Vice Chairman	0
14 Members	0
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board	
Vice Chairman	0
16 Members	0
Borders Health Board	
Vice Chairman	0
13 Members	0
Central Advisory Committee of Justices of the Peace (Scotland)	
17 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Borders Region	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Central Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Dumfries and Galloway Region	
Chairman	0
2 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Fife Region	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Grampian Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Highland Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Lothian Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Shetland Islands Area	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Strathclyde Region	
3 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for the Tayside Region	
3 Members	0
Childrens Panel for the Dumfries and Galloway Region	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Fife Region	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Lothian Region	
Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Shetland Islands Area	
Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Strathclyde Region	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Tayside Region	
Chairman	0
2 Deputy Chairmen	0
Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland	
Chairman	7,939
Deputy Chairman	5,030
Commons Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service Management Committee	
Chairman	12,355
7 Members	0
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	
2 Members	3,525
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board	
Chairman	10,810
Vice Chairman	0
15 Members	0
East Kilbride Development Corporation	
2 Members	3,525
Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee	
8 Members	0
Fife Health Board	
Chairman	13,415
Vice Chairman	0
16 Members	0
Forth Valley Health Board	
Vice Chairman	0
11 Members	0
General Teaching Council for Scotland	
4 Members	0
Glenrothes Development Corporation	
3 Members	3,525
Grampian Health Board	
Vice Chairman	0
16 Members	0
Greater Glasgow Health Board	
Chairman	22,730
Vice Chairman	0
17 Members	0
Highland Health Board	
Chairman	13,415
Vice Chairman	0
16 Members	0
Historic Buildings Council for Scotland	
Chairman	0
2 Members	0
Irvine Development Corporation	
2 Members	3,735
Jordanhill College of Education Governing Body	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0

Rank	Remuneration as at 1 July 1990 £
Lanarkshire Health Board	
Chairman	16,005
Vice Chairman	0
17 Members	0
Livingston Development Corporation	
4 Members	3,525
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland	
1 Member	1,573
Local Review Committee HM Prison Aberdeen	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Local Review Committee HM Prison Cornton Vale	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Local Review Committee HM Prison Dungavel	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Local Review Committee HM Prison Edinburgh	
Chairman	0
8 Members	0
Local Review Committee HM Prison Glenochil	
Chairman	0
7 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's Prison Penninghame	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's Prison Perth	
Chairman	0
6 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's Prison Peterhead	
Chairman	0
4 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's Prison Shotts	
Chairman	0
10 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's YO Institution Dumfries	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's YO Institution Polmont	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Local Review Committee Her Majesty's YO Institution Castle Huntly and Her Majesty's Prison Noranside	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Lothian Health Board	
Chairman	20,490
16 Members	0
Moray House College of Education Governing Body	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
National Galleries of Scotland Board of Trustees	
2 Members	0
National Museums of Scotland—Board of Trustees	
8 Members	0
Northern College of Education—Governing Body	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
Orkney Health Board	
Chairman	6,510
Vice Chairman	0
12 Members	0
Parole Board for Scotland	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
Police Advisory Board for Scotland	
1 Member	0
Red Deer Commission	
1 Member	0
Scottish Agricultural Statistics Consultative Committee	
5 Members	0
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	
Chairman	0
Scottish Committee for Staff Development in Education	
Chairman	0
14 Members	0
Scottish Community Education Council	
Chairman	0
7 Members	0
Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum	
17 Members	0
Scottish Dental Practice Board	
1 Member	0
Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board	
Chairman	0
5 Members	0
Scottish Economic Council	
1 Member	0
1 Member	0
Scottish Health Service Advisory Council	
9 Members	0
Scottish Homes	
3 Members	5,330
Scottish Legal Aid Board	
Chairman	17,170
7 Members	8,529
Scottish Records Advisory Council	
Chairman	0
Scottish Sports Council	
Chairman	0
Scottish Tourist Board	
1 Member	5,385
Scottish Valuation Advisory Council	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
10 Members	0
Scottish Vocational Educational Council	
Chairman	0
Vice Chairman	0
7 Members	0
Shetland Health Board	
Vice Chairman	0
3 Members	0

Rank	Remuneration as at 1 July 1990 £
12 Members	0
State Hospital Management Committee	
Chairman	11,955
3 Members	0
St. Andrew's College of Education Governing Body	
Chairman	0
2 Members	0
Tayside Health Board	
Chairman	18,250
17 Members	0
Western Isles Health Board	
Chairman	6,510
Vice Chairman	0
13 Members	0

Table 2
Appointments expiring in 1992

Rank	Salary as at 1 July 1990
Advisory Committee on Dental Establishments	
3 Members	0
Advisory Committee on Medical Establishments	
1 Member	0
Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland	
7 Members	0
Caledonian MacBrayne	
Chairman	15,000
2 Members	4,500
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Borders Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Central Region	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Dumfries and Galloway Region	
3 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Fife Region	
3 Members	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Grampian Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Highland Region	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Orkney Islands Area	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Shetland Islands Area	
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Strathclyde Region	
1 Member	0

Rank	Salary as at 1 July 1990
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for the Tayside Region	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Childrens Panel Advisory Committee for Western Isles Islands Area	
Chairman	0
2 Members	0
Childrens Panel for the Borders Region	
Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Central Region	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Dumfries and Galloway Region	
Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Fife Region	
Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Grampian Region	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Highland Region	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Lothian Region	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Orkney Islands Area	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Shetland Islands Area	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for the Strathclyde Region	
Deputy Chairman	0
Childrens Panel for The Western Isles Island Area	
Chairman	0
Deputy Chairman	0
Clyde River Purification Board	
8 Members	0
Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland	
3 Members	2,500
Consultative Committee on Freshwater Fisheries	
Chairman	0
8 Members	0
Countryside Commission for Scotland	
Chairman	15,365
Deputy Chairman	6,422
12 Members	0
Crofters Commission	
Chairman	36,848
2 Members	9,393
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	
1 Member	3,525
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board	
Chairman	10,810
East Kilbride Development Corporation	
3 Members	3,525
Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee	
1 Member	0

Rank	Salary as at 1 July 1990
Forth River Purification Board	
6 Members	0
Hannah Research Institute—Governing Body	
1 Member	0
Highland River Purification Board	
4 Members	0
Highlands and Islands Development Board	
Chairman	56,540
1 Member	46,695
1 Member	8,123
Historic Buildings Council for Scotland	
5 Members	0
Irvine Development Corporation	
2 Members	3,735
Lay Observer for Scotland	
1 Member	13,737
Livingston Development Corporation	
Deputy Chairman	8,272
2 Members	3,735
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland	
Vice Chairman	11,122
1 Member	1,573
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute	
7 Members	0
Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland	
Member	69,745
Member	32,551
Member	1,348
6 Members	1,420
National Galleries of Scotland Board of Trustees	
4 Members	0
National Museums of Scotland—Board of Trustees	
2 Members	0
National Panel of Specialists	
17 Members	0
North East River Purification Board	
3 Members	0
Parole Board for Scotland	
5 Members	0
Police (Scotland) Examinations Board	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Police Advisory Board For Scotland	
1 Member	0
Red Deer Commission	
Chairman	15,173
17 Members	0
Rowett Research Institute—Governing Body	
2 Members	0
Royal Botanic Garden—Board of Trustees	
4 Members	0
Scottish Advisory Committee on Top Grade Scientific Posts	
2 Members	0
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	
1 Member	0
Scottish Council For Post Graduate Medical Education	
11 Members	0
Scottish Council For Research In Education	
Chairman	0
2 Members	0
Scottish Crop Research Institute—Governing Body	
Chairman	0
14 Members	0
Scottish Development Agency	
1 Member	0
1 Member	60,500
Scottish Economic Council	
1 Member	0
Scottish Examination Board	
14 Members	0
Scottish Film Council	
Chairman	0
1 Member	0
Scottish Homes	
1 Member	5,385
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust	
3 Members	0
Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board	
4 Members	0
Scottish Legal Aid Board	
7 Members	8,528
Scottish Medical Practices Committee	
1 Member	0
Scottish Records Advisory Council	
5 Members	0
Scottish Sports Council	
Vice Chairman	0
Scottish Studentship Selection Committee	
Chairman	0
3 Members	0
Scottish Tourist Board	
1 Member	0
2 Members	5,385
Solway River Purification Board	
3 Members	0
State Hospital Management Committee	
7 Members	0
Tay River Purification Board	
3 Members	0
Tweed River Purification Board	
3 Members	0

Local History

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what initiatives he intends to take to encourage the teaching of local history in Scottish primary and secondary schools;

(2) what initiatives he intends to take to encourage primary and secondary schools to create awareness in the cultural heritage which is relevant to the localities in which the schools are located.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Local history and heritage form part of environmental studies in the curriculum for the five to 14 age group. Guidance to education authorities and schools will be issued later this year in a Scottish Office Education Department working paper.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the percentages of disabled staff employed within the health service in Scotland in each year since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table. Health boards and the Common Services Agency are expected like other employers, to comply with the provisions of the disabled persons employment Acts.

Percentage of disabled employees in the national health service in Scotland

Year	*Percentage*
1981	0·5
1982	0·5
1983	0·4
1984	0·4
1985	0·5
1986	0·4
1987	0·3
1988	0·3
1989	0·2
1990	0·2

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of adults with *(a)* mental handicap, *(b)* mental illness and *(c)* physical handicap in the format most convenient to his Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not possible to give precise figures of the total number of people in these categories, since not all will have come into contact with the health service or social work authorities. However, in 1988 the number of disabled adults in Scotland was estimated as 611,000. It is also believed that a similar number of people in any one year might consult a general practitioner about some form of mental ill-health.

Robert Burns

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he intends to take to encourage the teaching of the works of Robert Burns in Scottish schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The advice to education authorities and schools contained in Scottish Office Education Department working paper No. 2 on the teaching of English language is that Scottish texts should be actively sought and used.

Renfrew

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many burglaries there were in Renfrew district in each of the last three years; and what percentage those were of all reported crimes in the area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is given in the table.

	Recorded cases of housebreaking in Renfrew district	[1] *Housebreaking as a percentage of all crimes recorded by the police in Renfrew district*
1988	4,867	22·4
1989	5,303	22·5
1990	[2]5,675	[2]21·8

[1] In Scotland, information is collected on "housebreaking", rather than "burglary".
[2] *Source:* Report of the Chief Constable of Strathclyde, 1990.

Victim Support Schemes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the applications for financial support received from victim support schemes during the current financial year which *(a)* have been approved, *(b)* have not been approved and *(c)* are still pending consideration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Association of Victim Support Schemes—SAVSS—submits a single annual grant application to the Scottish Office to cover both its headquarters costs and the provision of aid for the appointment of co-ordinators, or towards running costs, in local schemes where demand warrants it. For the financial year 1991-92, the Scottish Office has awarded SAVSS a total grant of £405,000 made up of £320,000 for the development of local schemes and £85,000 for headquarters running costs.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on each victim support scheme within Scotland in the current financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Of the £405,000 awarded to the Scottish Association of Victim Support Schemes in the current financial year, £320,000 has been allocated for the development of local schemes. A funding panel, independent of the Scottish Office and the SAVSS, determines applications for grant submitted by local victim support schemes and may award grant aid either for the appointment of co-ordinators or towards running costs.

Drinking Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the places in Scotland where drinking water is or has recently been contaminated with cryptosporidium organisms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The organism is widespread in the natural environment and small numbers may be present from time to time in drinking water without giving rise to outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis. Only two such outbreaks have been associated with drinking water supplies in Scotland in recent years. One occurred in the Saltcoats and Stevenston area of Ayrshire in 1988 and the other in parts of Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and West Lothian in 1989. In the latter case, the evidence was not conclusive that the water supply was the source of the infection.

Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the provision of special needs education in Strathclyde.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Strathclyde education authority is statutorily responsible for the provision of special educational needs for children in their area.

Planning Policies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he gives to those local authorities which wish to include planning gain policies in their local plans; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Development Department issued a circular to local authorities on planning gain in August 1984—circular 22/84. The circular provides authorities with guidance on the circumstances in which they might reasonably seek an agreement with a developer under section 50 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 and on the inclusion in development plans of policies on the use of such agreements.

Mental Patients

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give *(a)* the total number of patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals or mental health units in each year since 1979 and *(b)* the number of places in mental health units in the community in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The table shows the number of discharges from psychiatric hospitals or mental health units in each year since 1979. The number of places in mental health units in the community in each year since 1979 is not held centrally.

Year	*Numbers of discharges from mental illness and psychiatric units in Scotland*
1979	25,116
1980	26,258
1981	26,512
1982	24,008
1983	26,271
1984	26,989
1985	27,675
1986	27,817
1987	28,613
1988	29,758
1989	29,620
1990	29,189

Sports Facilities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many indoor and outdoor sports facilities were managed by local authorities in Scotland at 1 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available information is set out in the table.

Sport facility	*Management type*		
	District council	*Regional council*	*Total*
Athletic tracks[1]	65	46	111
Dry ski slopes	4	7	11
Golf courses	69	0	69
Ice rinks	3	0	3
Sports halls/leisure centres	292	928	1,220
Swimming pools	120	230	350
Playing pitches[2]	1,004	625	1,629
Indoor bowling halls	19	26	45

[1] Including grass.
[2] Excluding synthetic pitches.

Ministerial Visit

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to visit the Paisley, South constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have no plans at present to visit the Paisley, South constituency.

Drink Driving

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of drink-driving-related offences within *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Renfrew district in each year since 1980.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is given in the table.

Number of recorded drink driving related offences 1980-89

	(a) Scotland	*(b) Strathclyde region*	*(c) Renfrew district*
1980	15,876	6,995	507
1981	13,765	6,193	459
1982	13,982	6,014	516
1983	15,373	6,701	408
1984	14,976	6,566	510
1985	15,379	6,657	477
1986	14,623	6,374	475
1987	13,484	5,926	467
1988	11,353	4,875	368
1989	10,916	4,763	390
1990	n/a	[1]4,809	[1]380

n/a not available.
[1] *Source:* Report of the Chief Constable of Strathclyde, 1990.

Green Belts

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to introduce a scheme for classifying green belt sites according to their environmental and amenity value.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. Such a scheme could imply that some parts of the green belt were less protected than others.

Opticians

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many opticians in Scotland registered with the national health service for each year since 1974.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of opticians registered with health boards in Scotland to provide general ophthalmic services for each year since 1974 is set out in the table.

	Ophthalmic opticians	*Ophthalmic medical practitioners*
1974	536	69
1975	517	69
1976	484	65
1977	477	73
1978	468	69
1979	467	69
1980	503	80
1981	500	74
1982	519	79
1983	535	90
1984	548	107
1985	670	106
1986	674	119
1987	776	115
1988	709	122
1989	744	114
1990	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Not yet available.

Judges (Appointment)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria used for the appointment of judges in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For any judicial appointment, the best available candidate is selected from among those who meet the statutory requirements.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, columns *614-16*, if he will provide the same information in real terms.

Mr. Lang: The following figures are deflated to 1989-90 prices using the Central Statistical Office's GDP deflator, adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.

In real terms, the figures for 1989-90 to 1990-91 were:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
TV advertising	613,000	974,000	800,000
Radio advertising	42,500	85,000	203,000
Newspaper advertising	402,000	1,022,000	662,000
Other promotional material	992,500	1,001,000	1,186,000

As indicated in the previous answer, an analysis in the form requested is not available for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88. However, total expenditure on information publicity at constant 1989-90 prices was:

	£
1979-80	527,000
1980-81	613,500
1981-82	607,000
1982-83	557,000
1983-84	496,500
1984-85	924,000
1985-86	843,000
1986-87	1,031,000
1987-88	1,249,000

For 1991-92 the provision for expenditure is £2,519,000 in real terms, at 1989-90 prices.

Historic Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the 1991-92 annual budget for Historic Scotland; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Total gross expenditure of £30,589,000 by Historic Scotland is provided for in the supply estimates 1991-92—Class XV vote 5. Running costs, which include salaries and wages, and allied costs such as travel and subsistence payments and general administrative expenditure, represent 31·9 per cent. of that expenditure.

Registers of Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the department of the Registers of Scotland; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Total expenditure for Registers of Scotland in 1991-92 is estimated at £30,087,000 of which 70 per cent. is for total staff costs.

Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Total expenditure for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency in 1991-92 is estimated at £10·313 million of which 47 per cent. is for staff costs, which include salaries, wages and general administrative expenditure.

Missing Persons

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to establish a national database of missing persons aged *(a)* under 18 years and *(b)* over 18 years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Criminal Records Office holds, on behalf of the police, details of all reported missing persons in Scotland who have been missing for one month or longer. Age, where known, is among the information recorded.

Marine Nature Reserves

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals concerning the creation of marine nature reserves; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no such proposals. Marine nature reserves may be designated

under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on recommendations from the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. So far, no formal recommendations for designation have been put forward.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made concerning the proposed marine nature reserve at Loch Sween; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Nature Conservancy Council issued a discussion document on 4 October and meetings with interested parties were held locally. A number of concerns were expressed by local people, landowners and organisations. Further consultation will take place before any formal recommendation is made for designation of the loch.

Parole

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners serving custodial sentences were reviewed for parole in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were released under licence; and how many reviewed and/or released were serving sentences of *(a)* seven years or more and *(b)* 10 years or more.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of prisoners reviewed for parole in 1988 and 1989 and released under licence is set out in appendix A of the annual report of the Parole Board for Scotland for 1989, copies of which are available in the Library. The figures for 1990 will be published in the annual report of the Parole Board for Scotland for 1990, which will be available later this year. The other information is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many recommendations by the Parole Board for the release of prisonerss under licence serving sentences of *(a)* less than seven years, *(b)* seven years and more and *(c)* 10 years or more have been rejected by the Secretary of State in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Workers Educational Association

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals concerning the development of further education involving the Workers Educational Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no such proposals.

Kvaerner-Kincaid plc

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received calling for action by his Department following the announcement of proposed job losses at Kvaerner-Kincaid plc of Greenock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I met a delegation led by the hon. Member today to discuss the situation at Kvaerner-Kincaid. The hon. Member was accompanied by representatives of the work force and Inverclyde district council.

Demolition Control

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he proposes to introduce planning controls over the demolition of houses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have today tabled amendments to the Planning and Compensation Bill that would enable the Government to bring the demolition of houses within planning control in Scotland.

Until recently the Government believed that demolition did not usually constitute development and therefore did not fall within planning control. However, a recent High Court decision in England held that, in the particular circumstances of the case, the demolition of dwelling houses was development. That decision is subject to an appeal.

For buildings listed as of historical or architectural importance and buildings in conservation areas, demolition is already covered by other controls. Most other demolitions of houses are not contentious and do not justify additional planning controls.

However, the Government are aware of the concern that has been expressed in particular cases. For example, some potential developers have demolished perfectly sound houses before having the necessary planning permission to erect replacement buildings. Rather than leave a vacant site that may blight neighbouring properties, the local planning authority can feel pressured to grant planning permission for an out-of-character development for which planning permission should be refused.

We do not believe that there is a widespread problem, but we have concluded that the time is now right to allow the selective introduction of controls on demolition where problems do exist.

The proposed amendments would extend the definition of development to include the demolition of all buildings. They would also incorporate a direction-making power, which would enable the Secretary of State to provide that the demolition of particular types of building is not development and would not, therefore, be subject to planning control. Since the problem that these amendments are designed to tackle relates in particular to dwelling houses, our intention is to use this power to exclude from control all demolitions except demolitions of dwelling houses.

Because most demolitions of dwelling houses would not justify the full application of the new controls, we propose amending the Town and Country Planning General Development (Scotland) Order 1981 to grant permitted development rights for the demolition of dwelling houses in most circumstances. This would mean that planning permission would not normally be required for such demolition.

However, if a local planning authority wished to prevent demolition in a particular case or in a vulnerable area, it could use its power to give a direction which would require the developer to seek planning permission before proceeding with demolition. Such a direction would require the confirmation of the Secretary of State if it is to remain effective for longer than six months.

By these measures we believe that it will be possible to control these undesirable cases of demolition without putting an undue burden either on developers or on local planning authorities.

A82 (Accidents)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a detailed list of accidents which have taken place on the A82 between the Fort William boundary and the Ballachulish bridge in each of the last three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* The information requested is provided in the table. Figures for 1990 are provisional.

Number of recorded injury accidents on the A82 between Fort William boundary and Ballachulish Bridge in the years 1988 to 1990

	1988	1989	1990
Fatal	1	2	1
Serious	5	11	4
Slight	12	17	10
Total	18	30	15

Mentally Handicapped People (Health Services)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the guidance given by his Department in relation to the use which hospitals boards make of funds derived from the sale of capital assets which were specifically devoted to services for the mentally handicapped.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The use which is to be made of the proceeds of sales of a particular category of property is not generally specified, but health boards are aware that they should give a high priority to the care of mentally handicapped and mentally ill patients.

Individual health boards are able to retain proceeds from the disposals they achieve—currently at the rate of 80 per cent. with the balance of 20 per cent. being allocated by the management executive to benefit the NHS capital programme.

Chernobyl

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to the answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 25 April, *Official Report*, column *547*, if he will list each region and district in Scotland giving the number of acres and hectares, numbers of sheep and numbers of farms under restriction following the Chernobyl accident as at *(a)* April 1990 and *(b)* April 1991; and if he will make a statement about the changes in the restrictions in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* The information is set out in the table. In each case holdings, or part holdings, were released from restrictions only after extensive monitoring had shown that animals leaving these areas no longer posed a threat to the food chain.

Restricted farms in Scotland

Region and District	April 1990 Holdings	Sheep	Hectares	Acres	April 1991 Holdings	Sheep	Hectares	Acres
Central								
Stirling	19	48,200	29,900	73,900	17	39,300	25,500	63,000
Dumfries and Galloway								
Total	16	25,600	11,100	27,400	10	19,100	9,500	23,500
Nithsdale	6	3,500	700	1,700	2	1,900	400	1,000
Stewarty	5	8,700	2,500	6,200	3	3,800	1,200	3,000
Wigtown	5	13,400	7,900	19,500	5	13,400	7,900	19,500
Strathclyde								
Total	38	59,500	26,000	64,200	36	57,900	25,200	62,200
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	5	4,900	2,600	6,300	5	4,900	2,600	6,300
Cumnock and Doun Valley	19	35,300	15,800	39,100	18	35,000	15,100	37,400
Kyle and Carrick	2	5,600	2,300	5,700	2	5,600	2,300	5,700
Cunninghame	2	2,000	1,700	4,200	2	2,000	1,700	4,200
East Kilbride	4	4,900	1,400	3,400	4	4,900	1,400	3,400
Eastwood	6	6,800	2,200	5,500	5	5,500	2,100	5,200
	Scotland							
Total	73	133,300	67,000	165,500	63	116,300	60,200	148,700

Figures for sheep numbers and area are rounded.

Lanarkshire Health Board

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many hospital patients residing within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area of the Lanarkshire health board were placed in a hospital in the Monklands/Cumbernauld unit over each of the last 12 months;

(2) how many hospital patients residing within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area of the Lanarkshire health board were placed in a hospital in the Motherwell/Clydesdale unit over each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* The following table sets out the number of patients resident within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area discharged from both the Monklands/Cumbernauld and Motherwell/Clydesdale units in 1990. The figures relate to discharges in the acute, maternity and geriatric sectors.

Number of Patients residing within the Hamilton East Kilbride unit area discharged from Monklands/Cumbernauld and Motherwell/Clydesdale in 1990

Month	Number of discharges Monklands/ Cumbernauld	Number of discharges Motherwell/ Clydesdale
January	352	203
February	323	186
March	363	232
April	360	162
May	366	204
June	375	179
July	346	148
August	391	191
September	378	176
October	395	203
November	402	186
December	356	200
Total	4,407	2,270

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients were placed in an acute medical bed within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit from outwith the unit area in each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The table sets out the number of patients residing outwith the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area discharged from acute beds within the unit in 1990.

Month	Number of discharges
January	68
February	72
March	85
April	74
May	73
June	79
July	68
August	78
September	57
October	87
November	67
December	50
TOTAL	858

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the intervention board; and what percentage is allocated to staff costs;

(2) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate; and what is the percentage allocated to staff costs;

(3) what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Central Veterinary Laboratory; and what percentage is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Curry: These are operational matters for the chief executives who will write to the hon. Member.

Farming and Livestock

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement listing the public money his Department has invested in all aspects of farming and livestock work in the constituency of Waveney in the past 10 years; and how much he expects to contribute over the next three years.

Mr. Curry: No. The range of schemes involved is extremely wide and information does not exist in a form enabling such a list to be compiled for individual constituencies.

Fishing

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement listing the public money his Department has invested in all aspects of the fishing industry; and what range of services has been covered, in the constituency of Waveney for the past 10 years; and how much he expects to contribute over the next three years.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry's departmental report—Cm. 1503—shows that estimated expenditure on support for the fishing industry in 1990-91 was £19 million and that this is planned to increase to £20 million in 1993-94. In addition, the Department carries out research and other scientific work in relation to marine fisheries: this cost some £7 million in 1990-91. Details of expenditure in the fishing industry in individual constituencies are not available.

Coastal Protection

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement listing the public money his Department has contributed to sea defence and coastal protection schemes in the constituency of Waveney during the past 10 years; and how much he expects to contribute over the next three years.

Mr. Curry: This Department has contributed nearly £2 million by way of direct grant to sea defence and coast protection schemes in the constituency of Waveney during the past 10 years. A further contribution of approximately £2·5 million is likely to be made over the next three years.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any source of BSE other than scrapie has been identified by his Ministry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No. The detailed epidemiological study continues to show that the most likely cause of BSE was the scrapie agent in cattle feed.

Farm Animal Welfare Council

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has considered an exhibition relating to the Farm Animal Welfare Council to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities in the House for an exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 10 June to Friday 14 June. I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will avail themselves of the opportunity to see at first hand the excellent work the Farm Animal Welfare Council does.

Agriculture Expenditure

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the amount spent in each of the last 10 years in supporting British agriculture both in *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect expenditure, in both cash and real terms.

Mr. Gummer: Details of direct agriculture support, including national grants and subsidies, in the United Kingdom for the 10 years from 1980-81 are given in the table:

Financial Year	*Cash terms (£ million)*	*Real terms (£ million) (1989-90 baseline)*
1980-81	1,012	1,715
1981-82	972	1,502
1982-83	1,433	2,068
1983-84	1,729	2,385
1984-85	1,712	2,247
1985-86	2,165	2,693
1986-87	1,449	1,744
1987-88	1,630	1,861
1988-89	1,380	1,467
1989-90	1,258	1,258
[1]1990-91	1,958	[2]1,843

[1] forecast
[2] using estimated deflator
Sources: 1980-81 to 1985-86—Annual Review White Papers.
1986-87 to 1990-91—Agriculture in the United Kingdom

Over the period 1988-90, expenditure under the CAP fell due to favourable world and EC market conditions.

Various items could be seen as offering indirect support. Details of all expenditure of each of the agriculture Departments appear in the supply estimate and appropriation accounts which are in the Library of the House. Those for this Department are published in class III.

Food Additives

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the food additives for which he has withdrawn approval since 1979, giving in each case the year when the additive was withdrawn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 21 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *457*. Since then, the approval for the use of potassium bromate as a flour treatment agent has been withdrawn.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 May 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

War Crimes Investigations

Mr. Amos: To ask the Attorney-General what has been the cost to the Director of Public Prosecutions office of inquiries into alleged Nazi war criminals living in the United Kingdom so far; what is the estimated cost of further investigations during the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The investigation of alleged criminal offences, including those made justiciable by the War Crimes Act 1991, is a police function. The role of the Director of Public Prosecutions will be to provide advice and guidance on legal issues arising in the investigation. No expenditure has yet been incurred in this respect. The DPP has, however, incurred expenditure of £600 in obtaining consultancy advice in the planning of arrangements for handling war crimes cases. The additional running costs of the Crown prosecution service attributable to war crimes cases during the current financial year is estimated to be in the range of £300,000 to £500,000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Maternity Services, Belfast

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many maternity beds were provided at the Royal Victoria hospital, the Mater hospital and the Belfast city hospital during 1988, 1989 and 1990; and what is the current level of provision at each of these hospitals.

Mr. Hanley: The average number of available maternity beds was as follows:

	1988	*1989*	*1990*
RVH (Maternity)	94·5	91·1	86·5
Mater	24	24	24
Belfast City	66·4	64	64

Figures for the current level of provision are not available.

Factory (Castlewellan)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what efforts the Industrial Development Board have made to try and secure a new owner for the factory located at Moss lane, Castlewellan, County Down, currently occupied by Castlewellan Yarns; and if he will make a statement about employment levels in the textile industry in South Down.

Mr. Needham: Castlewellan Yarns is a division of Linfield Group Ltd. which is the owner of the factory premises at Moss lane, Castlewellan. The group is not expected to vacate the premises for some months, but it has expressed its willingness to co-operate with the Industrial Development Board if an early purchaser is found. The IDB is making the factory's forthcoming availability known to potential investors and will be actively encouraging them to consider Castlewellan as a manufacturing location.

The IDB has eight client companies in the textiles sector in South Down. These companies operate at 10 locations and employ over 800 people. The IDB is maintaining close contact with the companies in order to encourage growth and increased competitiveness.

Chiropody

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures will be taken to reduce the waiting lists in respect of the chiropody services in the Down section of the Down and Lisburn unit of management.

Mr. Hanley: The management and delivery of services at local level are the responsibility of each health and social services board. I understand that the Eastern health and social services board is currently taking steps to reduce the waiting lists for chiropody services in the Down section of the Down and Lisburn unit of management by providing additional assessment and treatment sessions.

Agricultural Development Operations Programme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many farmers have made application to the agricultural development operations scheme; and how many of these have been successful

Mr. Hanley: Up to Friday 3 May 1991, a total of 1,280 applications had been received under capital grant elements of the agricultural development operations programme. Of that number, there were 144 under the North Antrim flood damage recovery scheme, 1,122 under the capital grant scheme and 14 under the farm innovation scheme. The majority of these applications are currently under consideration and it is not possible, therefore, to provide details of the numbers that will be successful.

Environmental Policies

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what level of financial and other resources will be available to the Department of the Environment in order to implement its environmental policies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The provision, including programme expenditure and staff costs, for the implementation of environmental policies by the environment service of the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland is £14·372 million in 1991-92. The activities of other services within the Department, for example, the water service, and of other Northern Ireland Departments, for example, the Department of Agriculture and Department of Economic Development, also contribute towards the achievement of a better environment.

Health and Social Services Councils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 25 April, *Official Report*, column *528*, when he will be able to list the names of the members of the four new health and social services councils, excepting those nominated by district councils.

Mr. Hanley: I hope to be able to announce the names of the members of the councils in the next few weeks.

Housing Executive

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total value of (a) domestic rates and (b) commercial rates, which were collected from Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants remitted to the Department of Environment (NI) in each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: Rates remitted to the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1988-89 amounted to £31,812,820·89; in 1989-90, £35,140,698·20; and in 1990-91, £36,759,847·23.

Information on the breakdown of domestic and non-domestic rates payable by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is not readily available and could be obtain only at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Electricity Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the board of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service following its decision not to renew the contract of its chief executive.

Mr. Needham: I last met the chairman on 9 April. The board is required to carry out a triennial review of the chief executive's contract. I understand that the board is currently considering this and that the chairman will make a statement shortly.

Domestic Rates

Mr Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the reduction in domestic rate bills in Northern Ireland as a result of the Budget.

Dr. Mawhinney: The reduction announced in the Budget is a good outcome for the Province's domestic ratepayers. As a result, they will contribute, on average, 36 per cent. less towards the cost of local authority-type services. This is in line with the switch to central funding of 36 per cent. of the amount charge payers contribute to local authority expenditure in Great Britain.

Although it should be noted that there is no precise analogy between the community charge which is a per capita charge and the Province's domestic rates which are property based, given that the associated Budget increase in VAT applies fully in Northern Ireland, it is entirely appropriate that ratepayers in Northern Ireland should receive this benefit. Northern Ireland receives its share of all United Kingdom taxation including VAT which, as an unhypothecated tax, is applied towards balancing the Northern Ireland Exchequer rather than being applied to particular purposes. Furthermore, the reduction, when seen in the light of the higher level of exchequer support for the rates in Northern Ireland, represents a very good settlement for domestic ratepayers in the Province.

Political Talks

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement about progress in the talks with political parties.

Mr. Brooke *[pursuant to the reply, 2 May 1991, c. 426]*:

On 26 March I informed the House that a basis for formal political talks concerning political development had been established. It was accepted by all the potential participants—the British and Irish Governments and the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland—that the talks would take place in three strands corresponding to the three principal relationships: those within Northern Ireland; those among the people of Ireland; and those between the British and Irish Governments.

Since the political talks began on 30 April there have been a number of bilateral exchanges between me and the political parties involved about a range of practical and procedural issues raised by the participants, concerning strands two and three. In addressing these issues I have maintained close contact with the Government of the Republic of Ireland which is, of course, a participant in both those strands.

Yesterday afternoon, I circulated to the parties a paper which indicated how these practical and procedural issues would be handled, and invited the parties to let me have their responses by 10 o'clock this morning. The text of that paper follows this reply.

The Alliance party of Northern Ireland and the Social and Democratic Labour party informed me that they were content without qualification that we should now proceed to plenary sessions on the basis that the relevant practical and procedural matters would be dealt with as indicated in this paper. The Irish Government were also content that matters should proceed on this basis.

I had a number of exchanges with the leaders of the two Unionist parties both before and after 10 o'clock this morning. They sought a meeting with the Prime Minister on the basis that this might provide sufficient clarification and reassurance to enable them to proceed with talks on the basis suggested.

There was a full discussion of the issues and in the light of the Unionist parties' agreement in principle to work the procedure on the basis of my paper, subject to clarification of detailed points with them as well as the other participants, I plan to consult the other participants to see if they are able to proceed on this basis.

Following is the text of the paper:

POLITICAL TALKS

Practical Issues Concerning Strands Two and Three

1. There has been extensive discussion of the venue for strand two, and other related practical questions, over the last two weeks.

2. In the light of that, with the benefit of the views expressed, and after close consultation with the Irish Government, I have decided to indicate the basis on which these talks would be held.

Strand Two

3. All meetings of strand two will have an independent chairman whose identity will be announced by the two governments after consultation with other participating parties.

4. Opening plenary meeting of strand two to be held in London.
5. Bulk of substantive exchanges in strand two to be held in Northern Ireland in a location to be determined. (It will of course also be open to the Chairman and the participants to hold non-plenary meetings wherever suits their mutual convenience.)
6. A plenary meeting of the strand two discussions to be held in Dublin towards the end of June.

Strand Three

7. While participating parties remain free to discuss strand three issues with the governments, strand three discussions will be concerned with the relationship between the two governments, and will take place between the two governments:

—other participating parties will be kept in touch with progress during strand three by regular liaison
—the two governments will meet other participating parties at their request for further discussion of strand three issues while strand three is taking place
—the outcome of strand three will be considered by all the participants alongside the outcome of the other two strands and nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole.

8. The strand one formation or the strand two formation, as appropriate, may consider issues further in the light of progress in strand three.

ENVIRONMENT

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has on the average price of *(a)* a terraced house, *(b)* a privately owned council house re-sold on the market and *(c)* other council houses in (i) Grimsby, (ii) Yorkshire and Humberside and (iii) the south-east and London in (x) 1989 and (y) 1990; and what is the percentage of each type in each area;

(2) what is his estimate of the average price of *(a)* terraced houses and *(b)* council houses in Grimsby.

Mr. Key: The available information on average prices is set out in the table:

£ thousands

	Great Grimsby		*Yorkshire and Humberside*		*South East and London*	
	1989	*1990*	*1989*	*1990*	*1989*	*1990*
Terraced house[1]	n/a	n/a	32·7	37·1	77·4	72·6
Council houses[2]	21·3	27·3	20·8	26·8	59·5	60·2

[1] Average price (excluding sales to sitting tenants) from the Department's 5 per cent. sample survey of Building Society mortgage completions.
[2] Average undiscounted price of dwellings sold to sitting tenants.

The available information on distribution of stock is as follows:

	Per cent. of total stock
Terraced houses (owner occupied)[1]	
Great Grimsby	n/a
Yorkshire and Humberside	18
South East and London	19
Council houses[2]	
Great Grimsby	21
Yorkshire and Humberside	25
South East and London	19

[1] Data from the 1986 English House Condition Survey.
[2] Data on all council houses at 1 April 1990 from the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) return.

HIP (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amounts allocated to Doncaster Metropolitan borough council's housing investment programme in each year from 1979 to-date, indicating the change as a percentage each year in real terms.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is listed in the table. Since 1981-82 authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their HIP allocations by drawing on a proportion of their capital receipts. For 1990-91 and 1991-92, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly.

Housing Investment Programme Allocations and Expenditure for Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

(£ thousands)

	Allocations		*Gross expenditure outturn*	
	Cash	*Percentage change*[1]	*Cash*	*Percentage change*[1]
1978-79	14,367	—	14,089	—
1979-80	16,270	−3	18,496	+13
1980-81	14,260	−26	13,796	−37
1981-82	11,170	−29	8,966	−41
1982-83	13,553	+13	13,523	+41
1983-84	14,405	+2	23,789	+68
1984-85	10,020	−34	12,353	−51
1985-86	8,202	−22	14,073	+8
1986-87	6,599	−22	14,774	+1
1987-88	6,808	−2	22,807	+47
1988-89	6,019	−18	22,950	−6
1989-90	4,767	−26	22,442	−8
New Capital Finance System				
1990-91	8,810		n/a	
1991-92	[2]7,950	−16	n/a	

Notes:
[1] Percentage change over previous year in real terms (using GDP deflator): except 1990-91 because of change to capital finance system.
[2] The allocation shown here is the initial allocation only. Additional supplementary credit approvals are expected to be issued in the course of the year.
n/a not available.

Household Incomes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Barrow in Furness, Great Grimsby, Westminster, Wandsworth and Elmbridge, the amount of central Government contribution to income under the relevant headings in terms of cash per household together with the reasons for any difference.

Mr. Key: The available information for 1991-92 is as follows:

£ per domestic hereditament	Revenue support grant	Special grants	Community charge grant
Barrow in Furness	293	211	251
Great Grimsby	453	38	256
Wandsworth	1,263	234	229
Westminster	1,347	52	219
Elmbridge	198	0	268

Information is not yet available about the amounts of community charge benefit subsidy, community charge reduction scheme grant, and other specific grants expected to be paid to these authorities.

The reason for the differences in the total amounts of revenue support grant and special grants are set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) and the Special Grant Report (No. 2). Differences in the amount of community charge grant per domestic hereditament are the result of differences in the numbers of charge payers per domestic hereditament in each area.

Disposable Income

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the increase in the real disposable income since 1979 of the average council tenant not on income support after payment of income tax, national insurance, council rents and rates/poll tax, school meals, school travel, medical prescription and other medical charges.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the basis for his estimate set out in paragraph 2 of his illustrative tables for the council tax of £80,000 for an average property value for England; whether it includes (i) leasehold and (ii) rented dwellings at their freehold value with vacant possession; whether it is on the same basis as the survey of property transactions in England and Wales given in chapter 14 of the 1990 "Inland Revenue Statistics"; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing the figures he is using on (i) his basis and (ii) the same basis as in tables 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 and 14.4.

Mr. Key: As explained in paragraph 2 of the notes covering the tables of illustrative council tax bills issued on 23 April, the estimates are for all domestic properties and use the same definition of value whatever the tenure of the property. They were produced on a basis different from the survey of property transactions in England and Wales given in chapter 14 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1990.

The data underlying the illustrative council tax bills cannot be presented in the form used in Inland Revenue Statistics; and the data underlying the tables in chapter 14 of "Inland Revenue Statistics" cannot directly provide the information needed to estimate the number of properties in each local authority area falling in each of the seven council tax bands.

Council House Sales

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing by range of consideration nationally and regionally the number and average value of transactions in 1989 and 1990 in (i) council dwellings sold to sitting tenants and (ii) other dwellings sold by individuals, together with the numbers as a percentage of the national and regional housing stock.

Mr. Yeo: The available information is in the table:

	Number of transactions		Average price		Number sold as per cent. of total housing stock	
	thousands		£ thousands		per cent.	
	1989	1990	1989	1990	1989	1990
(i) Council dwellings sold to sitting tenants[1]						
Northern	12·9	11·0	20·3	24·0	1	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	19·3	13·0	20·8	26·8	1	1
East Midlands	12·9	5·4	31·0	37·5	1	—
East Anglia	3·8	1·7	48·9	49·6	—	—
Greater London	24·3	20·7	62·5	60·3	1	1
South East (ex Greater London)	22·4	11·4	56·2	60·0	1	—
South West	11·6	4·9	45·2	46·0	1	—
West Midlands	18·9	11·8	28·4	33·9	1	1
North West	14·3	14·9	21·7	22·1	1	1
England	140·5	94·7	38·4	40·0	1	—
(ii) Other dwellings sold by individuals[2]						
Northern	53·5	43·7	40·9	47·3	4	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	92·7	78·9	45·3	50·4	5	4
East Midlands	57·6	60·6	53·2	54·4	4	4
East Anglia	25·2	35·2	68·7	62·2	3	4
Greater London	64·5	70·0	90·5	90·6	2	2
South East (ex Greater London)	153·7	184·9	86·7	82·5	4	4
South West	64·6	79·7	71·2	66·6	3	4
West Midlands	71·2	74·7	55·5	58·2	3	4
North West	123·6	97·3	44·6	52·9	5	4
England	706·5	725·0	62·8	66·1	4	4

[1] Average undiscounted price of dwellings sold to sitting tenants.
[2] Estimates from the Department's 5 per cent. sample survey of Building Society mortgage completions.
— less than 0·5 per cent.

Property Services Agency

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the future of the Property Services Agency as it relates to Scotland; (2) if he will make a statement on the future of the Property Services Agency.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 24 April, *Official Report*, column *434*.

Rufford Hospital, Lancashire

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made a decision on calling in the development in the green belt of the former Rufford hospital, Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has not yet made a decision on this case. I will write to my hon. Friend when the decision is made.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I am confident that the commission continues to fulfil its remit, which extends to England and Wales, in promoting value for money across the range of services.

Dangerous Chemicals, Norfolk

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the washing ashore at Salthouse, Weybourne and Kelling in Norfolk of dangerous chemicals.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* On Friday 3 May, the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport received a report from the Humber coastguard that the Swedish flag container ship Nordic Pride had lost four tank containers of chemicals overboard during bad weather 20 miles north of Blakeney.

In accordance with contingency plans for such incidents, MPCU immediately mounted a comprehensive air search for the containers. At the same time, MPCU scientific staff assessed the threat posed to the marine environment by the chemical—two tanks contained ethyl acrylate, with the others holding CHC feedstock and triethylenetetramine respectively—in consultation with colleagues from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and English Nature. The air search proved negative and since the conclusion of the joint assessment was that the tanks posed minimal threat to the marine environment, recovery was not deemed necessary. Local authorities were advised of the incident, the content of the tanks, and of the possibility of their coming ashore on the north Norfolk coast. The two tanks of ethyl acrylate were found washed ashore at Weybourne on the morning of Monday 6 May. The other tanks remain at sea.

Coastal local authorities are responsible for dealing with incidents of this sort where chemical containers are washed ashore and North Norfolk district council, in conjunction with the police, carried out these duties in this incident. I understand that the containers washed ashore and their contents were cleared from the area for safe disposal by the afternoon of Wednesday 8 May.

Industrialists (Environment Advisory Committee)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his advisory committee of industrialists on the environment will consider *(a)* Kuwait oil fires and *(b)* rain forest problems.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* The Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment has not yet held its first meeting. It is therefore premature to say which topics it will address, but it is unlikely that it will consider Kuwait oil fires.

Oil Spills

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *341-42*, on what date and by what process the tenders were offered for the supply of oil-skimming equipment to Bahrain; and if any further contracts have recently been awarded to Desmi Ltd.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Two contracts—total cost £282,924—for the supply of six heavy-duty oil pollution skimmers to assist the Government of Bahrain in dealing with the Gulf oil spill were awarded to Desmi Ltd. of Stoke-on-Trent on 28 February and 18 March. The selection of Desmi was made on the basis of an earlier tender exercise for the procurement of heavy-duty oil recovery skimmers for their own stocks carried out by the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport in January. This was supplemented by further inquiries made by MPCU in the course of advising my Department on the most appropriate equipment for the needs of Bahrain. No further contracts have been placed by my Department for pollution control equipment.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Innoval Europe Ltd, of Fraserburgh, is on his Department's tender list to supply equipment for dealing with oil spills; if he has information on the company's capabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The hon. Member has written to me to draw attention to the features of oil recovery equipment manufactured by Innovac Europe Ltd. and I have passed on this information to the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport, which has the professional and operational responsibility for dealing with pollution incidents at sea. I can confirm that the properties of the Innovac systems will be taken into account in any future consideration of Government requirements for this type of equipment.

Police Forces (Grants)

50. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial provision has been made in Government grants for police forces in England and Wales in 1991-92; and what was the comparable figure for 1990-91.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have been asked to reply.

Subject to parliamentary approval, provision of £2,615·7 million has been made for the payment of specific grants and special grants to police authorities in 1991-92. This compares with a provision of £2,269·7 million in supply estimates, and a total provision of £2,366·9 million after supplementary estimates, for 1990-91. In addition to these grants, expenditure on police forces is supported by central Government through revenue support grant and redistributed business rates, but these are not hypothecated to particular services.

TRANSPORT

Catalytic Converters

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cars in the United Kingdom are currently fitted with catalytic converters; and what proportion of new cars being sold are fitted with catalytic converters.

Mr. Chope: At the end of March 1991 over 180,000 cars registered in the United Kingdom were fitted with catalytic converters. In the first three months of this year, approximately 16 per cent. of all new petrol-engined cars being sold were fitted with these devices. These numbers are expected to increase sharply following planned changes in European Community requirements.

Leicester Eastern Bypass

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received concerning the possibility of an eastern bypass being constructed in Leicester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The A46/A6 Leicester eastern bypass was added to the national roads programme in the 1989 White Paper "Roads for Prosperity". This would be an outer bypass for through trunk road traffic. Routes have yet to be identified and no representations have been received.

Thirteen representations have been received about the route options currently being considered by Leicestershire county council for its Leicester eastern district distributer road. This road is not, however, a bypass as it is estimated that 90 per cent. of the traffic expected to use it would have origins and/or destinations within the city of Leicester. It is a local road proposal and will be fully examined at the local level as part of the statutory processes required for the construction of new roads.

Channel Tunnel Rail Links

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to give full consideration to all the proposed rail link routes to the channel tunnel, with a view to making a decision which will maximise private sector involvement.

Mr. Freeman: There are many issues including the prospects for commercial viability which the Government will consider very carefully before reaching decisions on British Rail's recommendations for the rail link.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of vehicle journeys on the A9 between Perth and Drumochter involving the transport of medium and high-level nuclear waste in the last three years; and if he will list the statutory regulations governing the transport of such waste.

Mr. Chope: My Department does not collect data of the kind requested.

Movements of radioactive materials by road are governed by the Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) (Great Britain) Regulations 1974 (SI 1974 No. 1735) and amendment Regulations 1985 (SI 1985 No. 1729).

Thurleigh Airport

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restraints are likely to be placed on development and use of Thurleigh airport, in accordance with Her Majesty's Government business aviation policy; and what effect further developments at Luton and Stansted will have on such limitation.

Mr. McLoughlin: Bedford (Thurleigh) airfield is not one of the airports round London identified by the Government as suitable to provide alternative facilities for business aircraft no longer able to use Heathrow or Gatwick. So business aviation policy will not govern Thurleigh's future. How much scope there might be for handling other air traffic from Thurleigh in addition to that from Luton and Stansted would depend on the nature, volume and timing of that traffic.

CIVIL SERVICE

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when it was decided not to publish in the *Official Report* information requested on total expenditure by non-departmental public bodies; and what were the reasons for this decision.

Mr. Renton: Details of total expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is set out in "Public Bodies 1990" whose publication was announced in the *Official Report* on 19 December 1990, at column *176* and copies of which are available in the Library of the House. This is the usual method of publicising this information.

NATIONAL FINANCE

HMSO

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the 1991-92 annual budget for Her Majesty's Stationery Office is; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* This question falls within the scope of the policy announced in

Cm. 1263: arrangements have therefore been made for the controller and chief executive of HMSO to respond direct. Copies of the letter will be placed in the House Library and with the Public Information Office.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Stationery Office is being examined as a candidate for privatisation.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The future of Her Majesty's Stationery Office is reviewed from time to time. There are, however, no current plans to privatise it.

Central Office of Information

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Central Office of Information; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* This question falls within the scope of the policy announced in Cm. 1263: arrangements have therefore been made for the chief executive of the COI to respond direct. Copies of the letter will be placed in the House Library and with the Public Information Office.

Royal Mint

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the 1991-92 annual budget for the Royal Mint; and what percentage of that is allocated to staff costs.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* This question falls within the scope of the policy announced in Cm. 1263: arrangements have therefore been made for the deputy master and chief executive of the Royal Mint to respond direct. Copies of the letter will be placed in the House Library and with the Public Information Office.

WALES

Dental Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* those district health authorities in Wales which have implemented his Department's recommendation in the circular on community dental services issued on 6 April 1989 that an annual reminder should be sent to parents about the benefits of regular dental examinations for their children.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available centrally. Responsibility for the issue of annual reminders rests with district health authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the procedures his Department has adopted to enable him to assess whether district health authorities have provided the necessary annual screening of the teeth of children in state-funded schools in areas of poor dental health and where availability of general dental services is poor.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Health authorities are required annually to provide the Department with statistical returns, including information on the screening of the teeth of school children. This information is published annually in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The level and frequency of screening is a matter for local determination by health authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance on the development of the new management information system referred to in paragraph 4 of his departmental circular on community dental services issued on 6 April 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since the publication of WHC(89)28 "The Future Development of Community Health Services" and following consultation with the national health service in Wales, a management information system providing an improved level of information has now been successfully piloted. Its introduction throughout Wales is currently under consideration.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: From my examination of Audit Commission reports, and from the variety of contacts which I and my Department have with the commission, I am satisfied that the commission is making a real impression on the way local and health authorities deliver the services for which they are responsible.

Singleton Hospital, Swansea

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State discussed trust status on his visit to Singleton hospital, Swansea.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agricultural Chemicals

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether patentable agricultural chemicals which are required to pass safety tests before they receive marketing approval will be eligible for supplementary protection certificates of the type proposed by the EC Commission for medicinal products.

Mr. Leigh: My colleagues and I accept that the patent term erosion in the agrochemical industry is similar to that for pharmaceuticals and that agrochemical patents should have similar supplementary protection. We intend therefore to seek either amendment of the Commission's proposal to cover agrochemicals or the introduction of a new proposal to that effect.

Offshore Oil and Gas (Standby Vessels)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the number of emergency and standby vessels which have been ordered in each of the last

three years for service in the United Kingdom's offshore oil and gas industry from shipyards located in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* None has been ordered.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

St. Margaret Ward High School

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the grounds on which he based his decision not to select the extension project for St. Margaret Ward Roman Catholic (aided) high school in the form approved by Staffordshire county council and the Diocesan Schools Commission.

Mr. Fallon: In determining capital allocations for improvement work at voluntary aided schools for 1991-92, my right hon. and learned Friend had sufficient resources to allocate for a proportion of improvement projects rated as top priority by their LEAs. The project at St. Margaret Ward school was not Staffordshire LEA's top priority.

Stratford Grant-maintained School

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements exist at Stratford grant-maintained school for the application of the curriculum complaints procedure, as agreed by him and the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Eggar: The governing body of Stratford school is required to make arrangements for the consideration and disposal of complaints relating to the curriculum and to agree those arrangements with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Audit Commission has produced reports exploring efficiency and effectiveness in various aspects of the education service, including the provision of primary and secondary schools, further education, and inspectorate and advisory services. The Department will continue to hold discussions as and when appropriate with the commission about its work in relation to the education service.

South West London College

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment has been made of the effect of the closure of the South West London college on the provision of higher and further education in the south-west London area.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council has advised my right hon. and learned Friend that the South West London College Higher Education Corporation should be dissolved and that, following consultations with the students, the college's provision should be transferred to other institutions. We are consulting the college and other institutions on this advice. The final decision will take account of all the responses received.

Boarding Schools

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further steps he has taken to secure the safety and welfare of pupils in independent boarding schools.

Mr. Fallon: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *121-23* and 18 February, *Official Report*, column *24*. Following consultations with interested bodies, regulations were laid on 24 April, coming into operation today, which require proprietors of independent schools to report where any member of staff is dismissed for misconduct, or would have been dismissed or considered for dismissal had he not resigned. Proprietors will also be required to provide particulars of all staff, not just teaching staff, on application for registration and annually.

My Department is writing to the proprietors and heads of all independent schools bringing these requirements to their attention. Conscientious reporting by schools will enable us usefully to extend the coverage of our list of people barred from employment in maintained schools —DES List 99—which is itself an essential resource for those responsible for the employment of staff in the independent sector.

At the same time, we shall provide each school with a copy of the guidance and regulations on the implementation of section 63 of the Children Act 1989. Section 87 places new duties on proprietors of independent boarding schools, and on local authority social services departments, to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. The guidance, which is published jointly by the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, has also been sent to social service departments and local education authorities and will, I believe, provide a sounder basis for securing all aspects of the welfare of pupils in boarding schools, including strengthening the arrangements for protecting them from sexual and physical abuse.

PRIME MINISTER

Bay of Bengal

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government made any offer to the Bangladeshi authorities to provide technical assistance in predicting storm surges in the Bay of Bengal.

The Prime Minister: No. This is an area where the United States of America is the principal donor. Bangladesh's cyclone early warning system was established in the 1970s when a satellite ground station was installed in Dhaka by a Bangladeshi organisation, the Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation. The ground station has subsequently been upgraded through a project funded by the Office of the United States Foreign Disaster Assistance and implemented by the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration. United States aid assistance has continued for this activity and now totals excess of US$6 million.

The Bangladesh authorities issued warning of the cyclone two days before it struck and an estimated 350,000 people were evacuated to anti-cyclone shelters.

Iraq

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Iraqi representations concerning their need to use helicopters for internal security which led the coalition representatives to concede that point during the ceasefire talks.

The Prime Minister: The Iraqi use of helicopters was considered at a meeting between General Schwarzkopf and the Iraqi military authorities on the suspension of hostilities at Safwan on 3 March. An Iraqi request to permit helicopter flights for transportation was agreed, without limitations of their use.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Brigade

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the total costs of fire brigades will be met from all central sources of funding, direct and indirect, in the current financial year; and what percentage will be paid locally.

Mr. John Patten: Support for the expenditure of fire authorities in England and Wales is provided by central Government through revenue support grant, redistributed business rates and community charge grant. This support is not hypothecated to particular services, and decisions on what portion should go to meet fire expenditure are at the discretion of the local authority concerned. For England and Wales as a whole, central Government meet about 85 per cent. of the budgeted revenue expenditure of local authorities.

Mr. Martin Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current establishment by rank for the South Yorkshire fire service; what is the number of vacancies in each rank; and what were the comparable figures for 10 years ago.

Mr. John Patten: The most recent centrally available figures relate to the establishment of the South Yorkshire county fire service on 1 January 1991. The establishments on this date and on 1 January 1981 are shown, by rank in the table, in comparison with figures showing the strength and the number of vacancies on each of those dates.

Police Forces (Budget)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what budget has been set for police forces in England and Wales in 1991-92; and what were the comparable figures for 1990-91.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government do not set a budget for police expenditure, but the police share of total standard spending—TSS—is an indication of what we would expect police authorities to spend to provide an acceptable level of service. For 1991-92 the police share of TSS for England and Wales is £4,900 million. The comparable figure for 1990-91 was £4,384 million.

	Establishment	*Strength*	*Vacancies*
1. *Wholetime operational ranks: 1 January 1981*[1]			
Chief Fire Officer	1	1	—
Assistant Chief Officer	4	3	1
Senior Divisional Officer	—	—	—
Divisional Officer I	8	7	1
Divisional Officer II	—	—	—
Divisional Officer III	19	18	[1]1
Assistant Divisional Officer	27	27	—
Station Officer	130	113	17
Sub Officer	102	91	11
Leading Firefighter	136	120	16
Firefighter	714	689	25
Total	1,141	1,069	72
2. *Wholetime operational ranks: 1 January 1991*[1]			
Chief Fire Officer	1	1	—
Assistant Chief Officer	4	4	—
Senior Divisional Officer	4	[2]3	1
Divisional Officer I	2	1	1
Divisional Officer II	6	5	1
Divisional Officer III	11	11	—
Assistant Divisional Officer	28	26	2
Station Officer	131	108	23
Sub Officer	102	100	2
Leading Firefighter	136	125	11
Firefighter	659	683	[2]24
Total	1,084	1,067	[3]17
3. *Retained operational ranks: 1 January 1981*			
Station Officer	8	8	—
Sub Officer	18	16	2
Leading Firefighter	27	23	4
Firefighter	198	114	84
Total	251	161	90

	Establishment	Strength	Vacancies
4. *Retained operational ranks: 1 January 1991*			
Station Officer	7	7	—
Sub Officer	17	10	7
Leading Firefighter	24	19	5
Firefighter	144	93	51
Total	192	129	63
5. *Control Room staff: 1 January 1981*			
Principal Fire Control Officer	1	1	—
Fire Control Officer	4	4	—
Senior Fire Control Operator	4	4	—
Leading Fire Control Operator	8	8	—
Fire Control Operator	20	19	1
Total	37	36	1
6. *Control Room staff: 1 January 1991*			
Principal Fire Control Officer	1	1	—
Fire Control Officer	4	4	—
Senior Fire Control Operator	4	4	—
Leading Fire Control Operator	8	8	—
Fire Control Operator	20	20	—
Total	37	37	—

[1] Includes fire prevention staff.
[2] Denotes surplus in strength relative to establishment.
[3] Net figure.

Police National Network

74. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his review of the police national network will be completed and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Work is in hand on establishing a detailed user requirement for a network to handle both voice and data communications between police forces and also between forces and other agencies within the criminal justice system. This work is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

South Yorkshire Police Force

77. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current establishment by rank for the South Yorkshire police force; and what are the number of vacancies in each rank.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is given in the table.

Establishment		Vacancies held
1	Chief Constable	—
1	Deputy Chief Constable	—
3	Assistant Chief Constables	—
11	Chief Superintendents	—
38	Superintendents	—
47	Chief Inspectors	1
159	Inspectors	—
456	Sergeants	2
2,282	Constables	9
Total 2,998		12

Lollipop Ladies, Cheshire

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lollipop ladies will be made redundant in Cheshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the provisions of section 26 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, authority for providing school crossing patrols in Cheshire is vested in Cheshire county council. I understand from the chief constable of Cheshire, who administers the scheme by local agreement, that it is expected that by the end of June some 60 or 70 school crossing patrol posts will have been withdrawn. Some further posts are to be reviewed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to ensure safety for children leaving school grounds once the services of lollipop ladies are discontinued.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Authority for providing school crossing patrols outside London is vested in individual local authorities who may make provision for them where they consider it necessary. The safety of children travelling to and from school is the responsibility of their parents.

Police Station, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government plans for a new police station at Hamilton, Leicester.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Proposals by the Leicestershire police authority for a new sub-divisional police headquarters at Hamilton have been approved for planning purposes and I understand that a site has now been purchased.

Provision for the police building programme is fully committed up to 1993-94. We shall decide later this year which schemes on the planning list should be authorised to start in 1994-95. The Hamilton police station is one of the schemes which will be considered, but there can be no guarantee that it will be given a start date.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place with the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association concerning consideration of the future of fire authorities under the review of local government.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office officials attended the annual general meeting of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association on 4 May, at which the future structure of local government was one of the items discussed. Representatives of the association, together with those of other organisations representing fire service employers and employees, will have a further opportunity to discuss the Government's proposals at a meeting of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council on 21 May 1991.

Parole Board

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the cases dealt with by the Parole Board (i) in 1990 and (ii) so far in the current year, were considered by the local review committee *(a)* six to 12 months previously, *(b)* three to six months previously and *(c)* up to three months previously.

Mrs. Rumbold: These statistics are not recorded centrally in this form and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were dealt with by the Parole Board (i) in 1990 and (ii) so far in the current year; what percentage of prisoners had passed their parole eligibility date at the time of the deliberations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: In 1990 the Parole Board considered some 7,400 determinate sentence cases; so far this year it has dealt with about 2,700. The detailed statistics sought on the timeliness of board deliberations are not available. There are not any general delays, but occasionally cases are held up for reasons beyond our control, such as late changes in inmates' circumstances.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who were dealt with by the Parole Board in 1990 received their decision after their earliest date of release; what was the average delay; and what percentages of the decisions were positive.

Mrs. Rumbold: These statistics could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. However, it is rare for a parole decision to be delayed until after an inmate's earliest date of release.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department of all cases dealt with by the Parole Board (i) in 1990 and (ii) so far in the current year, how many have had the home circumstances report completed *(a)* over 12 months previously, *(b)* six to 12 months previously and *(c)* three to six months previously; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The probation service is under standing instructions to provide updates on any changes to inmates's domestic circumstances or release plans. A letter has been circulated to all chief probation officers reminding them of the crucial importance of timely home circumstances reports to the parole process.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many instances of alleged maladministration or other complaints about parole dossiers have been reported by the Parole Board during the last two years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Parole Board has not raised any specific cases with me.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met the chairman and the controller of the Audit Commission on 11 March and had a valuable exchange of views on the commission's work on the police and other Home Office services provided by local authorities.

War Crimes Investigations

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost so far to *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* his Department of the inquiries into alleged Nazi war criminals living in the United Kingdom; what is the estimated cost of further investigations during the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The cost of the war crime inquiry, which was set up by the Home Office to investigate allegations that war criminals were resident in this country, was in the region of £460,000. It is estimated that police inquiries are likely to cost in the order of £700,000 in this financial year.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the names of the members of the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Queen has been pleased to approve a recommendation that the following be appointed members of the Royal Commission on criminal justice under the chairmanship of Viscount Runciman of Doxford: Mr. Robert Bunyard, Professor Sir John Cadogan, Professor John Gunn, Sir John May, Mrs. Yve Newbold, Ms Usha Prashar, Miss Anne Rafferty QC, Sir John Wickerson, Sir Phillip Woodfield and Professor Michael Zander.

Probation Service

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report of the scrutiny of in-service training for the probation service.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend received the report on 18 April and I am today placing copies of it in the Library.

I am grateful to the scrutiny team for its work and for its clear and comprehensive report. Its findings and recommendations will make a vital contribution to improving the training that the probation service will need to support its future work as a major criminal justice agency.

We are consulting the probation service and others with a view to its implementation as soon as practicable.

Family Conciliation Services

Mrs. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he will protect family conciliation services by taking responsibility for their funding.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 9 May 1991]:* The Government are reviewing the future of and funding for conciliation services as part of their consideration of proposals for divorce law reform.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Institute of Horticulture

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet representatives of the Institute of Horticulture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: At present I have no plans to do so.

Lindane

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Advisory Committee on Pesticides is expected to report on the safety of lindane.

Mr. Maclean: Data on lindane are currently being evaluated by the Health and Safety Executive. It is expected to be referred to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides by the end of the year.

Offal and Fallen Stock Disposal

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the amount of assistance given to agriculture for the disposal of offal and fallen stock.

Mr. Maclean: Government assistance to help the livestock industry overcome its problems on the disposal of fallen stock and animal carcase waste includes: practical advice from the state veterinary service and ADAS on alternative methods of carcase disposal including safe burial and incineration; funding of research with industry and the European Community into the type of rendering systems which will destroy certain pathogens; advising planning and regulatory authorities about the importance of adequate disposal facilities especially where planning permission is sought for incinerators; exempting small incinerators designed for animal waste from the inspection and authorisation requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; helping the rendering industry's examination of useful alternatives to landfilling for meat and bonemeal derived from specified bovine offal; and identifying investment in the by-products sector as one of the priority areas for aid under the EC grant scheme for marketing and processing agricultural products.

Milk Marketing Board

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future structure of the Milk Marketing Board.

Mr. Curry: The Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales has decided to press forward with specific proposals for transforming itself into co-operative status. We hope that the board will shortly bring the dairy trade and other interested parties into its discussions. We welcome the decision to open the way to changes enabling our milk industry to operate with the same competitive flexibility as in the rest of the European market. This must be in the best interests of milk producers, dairies, processors and consumers.

Environmental Research and Development

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research and development on environmental issues is currently funded by his Department.

Mr. Gummer: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is spending about £50 million a year on research and development related to environmental issues; that is almost half of the Department's total expenditure on research and development of about £120 million. This is a very significant level and underlines the Department's commitment to the soundest science on which to base our policies now and in the future.

I am pleased to announce the publication today of a brochure describing the wide range of environmental research and development that the Department has commissioned on such issues as conservation; water, air and soil protection; pests and pesticides; climate change; farm woodlands and set-aside; flood and coastal defence; genetic conservation and modification; and protection of fisheries and the marine environment. This brochure has been placed in the Library and the Vote Office of the House.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Donor Nations

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in rank order the donor nations of the United Nations showing the proportion of GDP donated, for the most recent year available, and the amounts in sterling.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest information is as follows; GDP figures are not available.

Official development assistance by United Nations member countries in 1988 in ODA/GNP percentage order

Country	*Per cent of GNP 1988*	*Amount £ million*
Saudi Arabia	2·64	1,150
Norway	1·04	553
Netherlands	0·98	1,252
Denmark	0·89	518
Sweden	0·86	861
France	0·72	3,854
Finland	0·59	341
Libya	0·52	72
Canada	0·50	1,318

Country	Per cent of GNP 1988	Amount £ million
Australia	0·46	618
Belgium	0·41	337
Kuwait	0·40	61
Germany	0·39	2,656
Italy	0·39	1,793
Japan	0·32	5,128
United Kingdom	0·32	1,489
Luxembourg	0·29	10
New Zealand	0·27	58
Austria	0·24	169
United States	0·21	5,693
Ireland	0·20	32
Portugal	0·20	[1]47
Qatar	0·08	2
Venezuela	0·08	31
Spain	0·07	135
Greece	0·07	[1]21
UAE	0·07	10
Nigeria	0·05	8
China	0·03	72
India	0·03	46
Algeria	0·02	[1]7
Iceland	0·02	1
USSR	[2]—	2,361
Israel	[2]—	10
Yugoslavia	[2]—	3
Other Central and Eastern Europe	[2]—	292

Source: OECD.
[1]Estimate by DAC Secretariat whole or in part.
[2]GNP figures not available.

Colonial Civil Servants' Pensions

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to protect from erosion the pensions of former colonial civil servants who served in Zimbabwe before independence.

Mrs. Chalker: Responsibility for the payment and protection of the pensions of former Zimbabwe—Southern Rhodesia—civil servants rests with the Government of Zimbabwe. Our obligation towards the pensions of former colonial officers is confined to those for whom the British Government acknowledge a special responsibility by virtue of their having been recruited by, or on behalf of, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, for employment on expatriate terms in the central government of a colony. Zimbabwe pensioners do not come into this category. Southern Rhodesia was a self-governing colony from 1923; recruitment to its public service was made directly by that Government, and staff served on local, as opposed to expatriate, terms of service. There are large numbers of overseas pensioners whose pensions are being eroded in value by falling exchange rates and, indeed, many who receive no payment at all. I could not justify helping Zimbabwe pensioners in isolation, and the financial consequences of assisting all overseas pensioners who face such problems would be prohibitive.

Family Planning

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions for 1991 are being made to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organisation's special programme on human reproduction.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom has pledged the following contributions for 1991:

	£ million
IPPF	7·5
UNFPA	7·5
WHO/HRP	2·55

Population

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total expenditure on population activities for 1991; and what percentage this represents of total gross public expenditure on aid for 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: Figures for 1991 will not be available until 1992 and details of total United Kingdom aid expenditure in 1990 are still being finalised. In 1990 ODA spent over £21 million on activities directly related to population concerns, a 21 per cent. increase on 1989 expenditure. In addition, most maternal and child health and women's education programmes contribute to reducing population growth. We shall continue to use all possibilities to extend the availability of family planning advice and assistance.

Kurds

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his written answers to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 25 April, *Official Report*, columns *507-8*, and 2 May, *Official Report*, column *288*, if he will *(a)* update the information given and *(b)* provide details of those supplies (i) obtained from and (ii) despatched on behalf of the voluntary organisation British Aid for the Kurds;

(2) pursuant to his written answers to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 25 April, *Official Report*, columns *507-8*, and 2 May, *Official Report*, column *288*, if he will provide comparable details for materials despatched as aid for the Kurds by means other than air transport.

Mrs. Chalker: *(a)* Since 24 April, an estimated total of 541·9 tonnes of further relief supplies have been sent by the Overseas Development Administration, and an estimated total of 124·2 tonnes have been sent by non-government sources. The details of which the Department are aware are as follows:

Agency	Date	Aircraft	Tonnage	Destination
ODA	25 April	1 × Boeing 707	37·3	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	26 April	1 × Boeing 707	23·8	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	27 April	1 × Boeing 707	27·5	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	28 April	1 × Boeing 707	28·7	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	28 April	1 × Boeing 707	25·9	Orumiyeh, Iran
ODA	29 April	1 × Boeing 707	32·4	Orumiyeh, Iran
ODA	30 April	1 × Boeing 707	32·4	Orumiyeh, Iran

Agency	Date	Aircraft	Tonnage	Destination
ODA	1 May	1 × Boeing 707	40·7	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	1 May	1 × Boeing 707	[1]40·0	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	2 May	1 × Boeing 707	[1]40·0	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	5 May	1 × Boeing 707	[1]40·0	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	8 May	1 × Boeing 707	[1]40·0	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	9 May	1 × Boeing 707	32·4	Orumiyeh, Iran
ODA	10 May	1 × Boeing 707	35·8	Orumiyeh, Iran
OXFAM	26 April	Not known	31·7	Iran
SCF	3 May	Not known	30·0	Tabriz, Iran
OXFAM	4 May	Not known	42·5	Iran
OXFAM/SCF	13 May	1 × Antonov 12	15·0	Dyabakir, Turkey
SCF	13 May	Not known	5·0	Dyabakir, Turkey

[1] Denotes estimate.

In addition to supplies procured by the ODA, spare capacity on aircraft chartered by the ODA has been filled by goods including

Supplies	Donor
Flour	Spillers
High protein biscuits	United Biscuits
High protein biscuits	Feed the Children
Panadol tablets	Sterling Pharmaceuticals
Various products	Mars

The ODA provided a Boeing 707 on 25 April to carry approximately 33 tonnes of supplies, and road transport for approximately 35 tonnes of further supplies collected by the Northern Ireland voluntary organisation Impossible Probable. The ODA also chartered an Iran Air Boeing 747 on 10 May, carrying approximately 65 tonnes of goods donated to the Iranian embassy in London.

A number of voluntary organisations have sent further supplies on Iran Air's weekly commercial flight.

(b) The ODA has neither obtained supplies from British aid for the Kurds, nor dispatched any supplies on their behalf.

Aid (Africa)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister for Overseas Development will urge her counterparts on the European Council of Ministers to consider an emergency decision to provide an additional 750,000 tonnes of food aid to Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: The members of the European Community have promised to provide an additional 600,000 tonnes of emergency food aid for Africa; 400,000 tonnes will be financed from the EC budget and 200,000 tonnes bilaterally. We shall continue to stress the importance of getting this additional food aid to those in need very quickly. The situation will be reviewed at the Development Council on 27 May.

European Bank for Reconstruction and development

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received from governments in eastern and central European countries for assistance with the training of social workers and the establishment of social services departments; if these will be eligible for financial assistance from the European bank for reconstruction and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are providing help from the know-how fund to employment services to eastern and central Europe. Restructuring of existing industry will be an important task for the European bank for reconstruction and development, and it will need to take account of the social and employment implications. No specific investment proposals have yet been put to the bank's board of directors for approval.

Publications

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the European bank for reconstruction and development will provide financial assistance to groups to publish newspapers and periodicals in countries in central and eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The European bank for reconstruction and development is working to identify investments in central and eastern Europe to help promote development of the private sector. Initial operational priorities include restructuring of financial institutions, the environment, infrastructure and help with small businesses. No specific investment proposals have yet been put to the bank's board of directors for approval.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for how long the housing benefit claim from the Isle of Wight county council has been outstanding.

Miss Widdecombe: In the Isle of Wight the housing authorities are the two district councils, Medina and South Wight. Both authorities have outstanding subsidy claims in respect of housing benefit paid to people in local authority residential homes in the financial years 1985-86 and 1986-87. Payment of these claims is subject to reaching agreement with the Department on the amount of benefit for which subsidy is payable.

Payments of general housing benefit subsidy to Medina are up to date. The settlement for South Wight for 1988-89

has not been finalised because its claim has yet to satisfy fully the requirements of the district auditor and the Department. However, as is customary, the council received monthly payments on account throughout 1988-89, based upon its own estimates of housing benefit expenditure.

Disablement Benefit

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims were made for Department of Social Security disablement benefit and how many disability assessments were made in each of the categories 1 to 4 per cent., 5 to 8 per cent., 9 to 13 per cent., 14 to 17 per cent., and above, for each of the prescribed industrial diseases A4, A7, and A8 and for each of the years 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Repetitive Work

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his plans to publicise the benefits available for sufferers in relation to musculo-skeletal disorders which are associated with repetitive work.

Mr. Scott: There are no plans to publicise the benefits available to sufferers of musculo-skeletal disorders specifically. However the Department does produce a number of comprehensive leaflets for people who suffer injury at work to inform them of the benefits they are entitled to: FB 28—Sick or Disabled; NI 2—If you have an Industrial Disease; NI 6—Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit; NI 16—Sickness Benefit.

Due to the wide variety of illnesses which can be work-related it would be impractical to produce separate literature for individual diseases, but every effort will be made in future to publicise this type of disorder specifically in benefits leaflets.

Poll Tax

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will receive full rebate on poll tax payments in 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available estimates are in the table.

Community Charge Benefit recipients also in receipt of Income Support, 1991-92

	Millions (Individuals
England	3·5
Scotland	0·5
Wales	0·25
Great Britain	4·25

Source: Modelled using data drawn from 1987-88 Family Expenditure Survey and 1990-91 Management Information System.

Additionally, there will be some charge payers not in receipt of income support who will receive maximum community charge benefit in 1991-92.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the poll tax rebate system.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to change the basic structure of the community charge benefit scheme.

Community Care Grants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table indicating *(a)* the number of applications for community care grants received, *(b)* the number of community care grants paid and *(c)* the cash value of community care grants paid by the offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow in each month of 1990 for each of (i) the elderly, (ii) mentally ill, (iii) handicapped, disabled/chronically sick, (iv) young persons leaving care, (v) persons who have abused/misused alcohol/drugs, (vi) ex-offenders, (vii) persons without a settled way of life, (viii) families under exceptional pressure and (ix) those suffering threats of physical violence.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the client groups requested, but information relating to the total number of community care grants received, paid and the cash value of those paid, is in the Library.

Greenock and Port Glasgow Local Offices

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for social fund loans from his Department's two local offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow were refused on the grounds of inability to repay such loans; and if he will show this figure as a percentage of all applications for loans from these two offices in 1988-89, 1989-90, and 1990-91 to date.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies of his letter will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were claiming income support or supplementary benefit in (i) residential care and (ii) nursing homes for each year since 1979 at his Department's offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures for the number of persons on income support in Greenock and Port Glasgow who have (i) poll tax arrears for which they are subject to a liability order, (ii) social fund loan repayments, (iii) directed repayments for fuel and lighting arrears, (iv) rent arrears and (v) other debts.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies of his letter will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

HEALTH

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time speech therapists are currently employed by each health district authority in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Renal Services

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the comparative coverage and quality of renal services within the health services of European Community countries.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on the comparative coverage and quality of renal services within the EC is not collected centrally. Data from renal units in this country and abroad are collected by the European Dialysis and Transplant Association. This is published annually and a copy of its latest report will be placed in the Library.

Student Nurses (Bursary)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the bursary for student nurses set under Project 2000 was last increased; by how much it was increased; and what is its current value.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Project 2000 bursaries were introduced in September 1989, and range from £4,000, for a student who is under 26 at the start of the course and studying outside London, to £5,200 for a student who is 26 and over at the start of his or her course and is studying in London. These levels are currently under review.

NHS Reforms (Letters to Employees)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the national health service of the national circulation to each NHS employee of letters on developments under the Government's NHS reforms in the last six months.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The only letter sent out to all national health service employees in the last six months was one from the NHS chief executive, marking the implementation of the NHS reforms on 1 April. The cost of printing and distributing this letter to health authorities was met by the Department. There was no additional expense to the NHS other than that of distributing the letter to employees through health authorities' normal channels of communication.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We meet the commission from time to time to discuss its work on value for money in the national health service and personal social services. We are confident that the commission continues to fulfil its remit in promoting value for money.

SCOTLAND

Arts

15. **Sir Nicholas Fairbairn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the contributions made by Her Majesty's Government to the buildings, services and finance of the arts in Scotland since 1979; and if he will make a statement on his plans for government funding for the arts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have provided recurrent funding for the arts in Scotland amounting to £162·4 million since 1979; a real terms increase over the 1979-80 figure of 67·5 per cent. My Department has also provided £39·9 million for building works since 1988.

For the future, I have already committed major expenditure on the new Museum of Scotland and on the extension of the National Library of Scotland.

Scottish Council (Development and Industry)

18. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Council (Development and Industry); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend met the chief executive of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) on 20 February to discuss current industrial issues. My hon. Friend and I look forward to a continuing exchange of views with the council.

Council Tax

19. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he received in favour of retaining the 20 per cent. minimum contribution of the poll tax prior to the introduction of the council tax.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend continues to receive a number of representations in support of the present community charge arrangements generally. The comparatively small number of representations he has received on the specific issue of the 20 per cent. minimum contribution have favoured its removal.

Mar Lodge Estate

20. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will purchase the Mar Lodge estate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are well aware of the importance of Mar Lodge estate to the longer term management of the Cairngorms. For most of Scotland environmentally sensitive management is secured through private ownership. But we would of course consider, without commitment, any proposition put to us.

Local Taxation

21. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on representations which he has received in relation to the reform of local taxation in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has already received a number of comments on the new proposals and expects to receive many more before the end of the consultation period. All representations will be carefully considered.

Tourism

23. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the numbers employed in tourism in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Department of Employment estimated that in 1989 there were 154,000 employees in tourism and leisure-related industries in Scotland. This represents about 8 per cent. of Scottish employment.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he has regarding the operation of a tourist tax in any other EC country, Japan or the United States of America;

(2) whether he has any plans to introduce a tourist tax in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The consultation paper on the new council tax mentions a tourist tax only in the context of discussing possible sources of local finance which might be used to supplement council tax revenue in particular circumstances. The Government have no specific proposals in this area and no detailed research has been done. The Government will, however, be happy to consider suggestions which may emerge from the consultation exercise.

Dounreay

24. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of Highland and Grampian regional councils to discuss proposals for the drilling of test boreholes at Dounreay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of Highland and Grampian regional councils to discuss proposals for the drilling of test bore-holes at Dounreay. In view of his role in determining planning appeals relating to the site, it would have been inappropriate for my right hon. Friend to do so.

Scottish Homes

25. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of Scottish Homes' tenants to discuss the future of metal-framed houses in the Fraser and Findlay areas of Leith.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. This is a matter for Scottish Homes itself to consider.

30. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to review the role of Scottish Homes as a landlord.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend gives Scottish Homes annual targets for each of its main areas of activity including its landlord role. Its performance, set against these targets, is reviewed regularly.

Farming (North-East Fife)

26. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to encourage farming in north-east Fife.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Farmers in north-east Fife stand to benefit from various national schemes which support agriculture; apart from support through the intervention system, over £100 million a year is now spent in Scotland through livestock subsidies. Other schemes aim to assist farmers adjust their business in the face of prospective changes in agricultural support and of increasing interest in the countryside: for example the set-aside and farm woodland schemes, and schemes for farm diversification and conservation. In particular, I welcome the north-west Fife rural initiative, which receives public support through Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Agricultural College and the local authorities.

Local Government Reorganisation

27. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any representations seeking reconsideration of his decision not to appoint an independent commissioner to investigate options for reorganisation of local government in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations requesting that the review of local government in Scotland should be conducted by an independent commission. In his reply of 29 April to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) he gave a full explanation of his reasons for concluding that this was not the best or most appropriate way forward for Scotland.

29. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the reorganisation of local government.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 8 April 1991 when we discussed, among other things, our proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Scotland. A further meeting with representatives of the sub-committee established by the convention on the future of local government in Scotland will be held shortly.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the structure of local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel).

Manufacturing Jobs

28. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of manufacturing jobs which will be lost in Scotland for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In keeping with the practice of previous Governments, the Government do not publish forecasts of Scottish employment.

Health Building Projects

31. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many major new health building projects have been completed during the last five years; how many are under construction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Since 1 April 1986, 30 projects with a building cost in excess of £1 million have been completed at a total cost of £210 million, and a further 22 projects are currently under construction or are being commissioned at an expected cost of £220 million.

I am pleased to state that this record represents part of the largest building programme in the history of the national health service in Scotland, with more than 70 major building projects now completed since 1979. Over £185 million of new capital investment is planned in 1991-92 alone.

NHS Trusts

32. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications from national health service hospitals for self-governing status he expects to receive in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no idea as the initiative to apply for NHS trust status comes from the hospitals themselves. So far, there have been seven expressions of interest, one of which I have indicated cannot go ahead. Two applications for trust status have been received. NHS trusts offer an opportunity for hospitals to be returned to the communities they serve while remaining part of the NHS but with decisions being taken at hospital level.

Lanarkshire Working Party

33. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to report on the conclusions of the Lanarkshire working party established by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The final meeting of the Lanarkshire working group took place on Friday 10 May. The group's conclusions and recommendations are being finalised in the light of members' comments at that meeting; I expect to receive its report shortly, and to publish it as soon as possible thereafter.

NHS Funding

34. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends meeting chairs of health boards in Scotland to discuss funding and organisation of the national health service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I met the chairmen of health boards on 3 May and do so regularly. I will be meeting with them again on 28 June.

Industrial Estates

35. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to increase investment in the refurbishing of industrial estates.

Mr. Allan Stewart: One of the principal functions of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise is to encourage the provision of suitable property to meet the needs of industry in Scotland. The refurbishment of property is primarily a matter for the property owners; but Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the local enterprise companies, may assist with refurbishment costs where a failure in the market is creating an obstacle to the private sector investment and in order to promote the normal functioning of the market. The Government have made substantial resources available to them for this purpose.

Employment

36. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he makes of the likely implications for employment of the recession in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In keeping with the practice of previous Governments, no forecasts of Scottish employment are published.

Public Sector Housing

37. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the capital debt faced by Scottish public sector housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The outstanding capital debt associated with public sector housing in Scotland at 31 March 1991 amounted to £4·7 billion, or about £5,700 per house. The Government provide subsidy to those public sector housing authorities with relatively high levels of capital debt.

Dr. Gray's Hospital, Elgin

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the approval in principle of the establishment of *(a)* a specialist maternity gynaecology and obstetrics unit and *(b)* a specialist orthapaedic unit at Dr. Gray's hospital, Elgin, have now been fully funded; what progress is being made, and when he expects the work to be completed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Approval in principle for the redevelopment of Dr. Gray's at a cost of £16·1 million has now been given to Grampian health board. The development will include the full range of maternity, gynaecology, obstetrics and orthopaedic services. Work on the redevelopment is expected to be phased starting in August 1992 and being completed by early 1997.

Grampian Health Board

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what money has been allocated by Grampian health board or the Scottish Home and Health Department for the exploration by Grampian West unit of the possibility of establishing trust status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office Home and Health Department and Grampian health board have made available £90,000 to help the West Grampian unit to implement a number of White Paper initiatives including preparing an NHS trust plan, following an expression of interest in acquiring trust status from the unit.

Day-care Places

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many day-care places for adults who are *(a)* mentally handicapped, *(b)* mentally ill or recovering from mental illness and *(c)* physically handicapped are provided by (i) local authorities and (ii) health authorities in Scotland in each regional council and health board area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest figures, based on annual statistics provided by local authorities and information obtained from recent inquiries of the health boards, are shown in the following tables:

Persons attending local authority day centres at 31 March 1989

Region	Client group: Mentally handicapped	Mentally ill	Physically handicapped	Multiply handicapped	Total persons	Total places[1]
Borders	121	0	57	27	205	169
Central	313	0	100	61	474	492
Dumfries/Galloway	213	4	10	37	264	274
Fife	430	1	93	136	660	565
Grampian	603	2	178	81	867	873
Highland	161	3	13	13	190	205
Lothian	786	300	392	230	1,708	1,424
Strathclyde	2,906	117	662	376	4,061	3,997
Tayside	447	1	11	7	466	466
Orkney	31	5	9	0	45	54
Shetland	27	0	3	0	30	55
Western Isles	30	0	34	4	68	40
TOTAL SCOTLAND	6,068	433	1,562	975	9,038	8,614

[1] Places in local authority day centres relate to the capacity of the centre. Places can be occupied by more than one client during a week. Places available cannot be classified as they are not designated to any group in the centres which provide for several client groups. However, centres specifically for the elderly have been excluded.

Current number of day hospital places provided by health boards in Scotland[1]

Health board	Mentally handicapped	Mentally ill	Physically handicapped	Total
Borders	3	33	—	36
Forth Valley	—	90	—	90
Dumfries and Galloway	4	70	—	74
Fife	46	243	12	301
Grampian	53	220	10	283
Highland	—	207	—	207
Lothian	31	643	30	704
Greater Glasgow	—	441	—	287
Lanarkshire	12	63	—	75
Argyll and Clyde	5	201	—	206
Ayrshire and Arran	9	75	—	84
Tayside	30	244	13	287
Orkney	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	4	—	4
Total	193	2,534	65	2,792

[1] Adult places in some areas may be used by children from time to time. These "part use" places have been included in the total.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many day-care places for children who are *(a)* mentally handicapped, *(b)* mentally ill or recovering from mental illness and *(c)* physically handicapped are provided by (i) local authorites and (ii) health authorities in Scotland in each regional council and health board area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available information which relates to children attending local authority services at 31 March 1990 is given in table A. Table B gives information about places provided by health boards at 31 March 1991.

Table A
Children attending local authority day services

	Mentally handicapped	Physically handicapped	Multiple handicapped (mental and physical)
Borders	7	2	2
Central	0	0	0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0	0
Fife	12	19	8
Grampian	0	1	3
Highland	0	0	1
Lothian	47	111	27
Strathclyde	38	39	22
Tayside	14	11	3
Orkney	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0
Western Isles	0	0	0

In addition, local authorities make use of facilities provided by voluntary and private establishments.

Table B
Day hospital places for children provided by health boards

	Mentally handicapped	Mentally ill	Physically handicapped
Borders	0	0	0
Forth Valley	0	0	0
Dunfries and Galloway	0	10	0
Fife	0	0	0
Grampian	0	8	0
Highland	0	0	0
Lothian	0	0	0
Greater Glasgow	0	13	0
Lanarkshire	0	0	0
Argyll and Clyde	0	44	0
Ayrshire and Arran	0	0	0
Tayside	27	0	0
Orkney	0	0	0

	Mentally handicapped	Mentally ill	Physically handicapped
Shetland	0	0	0
Western Isles	0	0	0

Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the leader of Strathclyde regional council to discuss central Government funding for the region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The leader of Strathclyde district council was among representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities who met my right hon. Friend and I on 8 April 1991 to discuss local authority finance.

Truancy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount of truancies affecting the education authorities in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Renfrew division in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available. However, on 9 May I announced that I had commissioned the biggest survey of truancy in Scotland ever undertaken. Results from the survey will be available in early summer.

Renfrew District Council

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the leader of Renfrew district council to discuss central Government funding for the district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I last met the leader of Renfrew district council on 13 May when he and a delegation discussed economic issues relating to Barrhead and Neilston.

Horticulture

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the horticultural industry in Scotland in the last year; and when he next plans to consult the industry on contemporary matters.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the last year the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department has had consultations with the industry on a number of issues such as research and development, the impact of imports from eastern Europe on the soft fruit sector and the introduction of a statutory certification scheme for raspberry canes. My right hon. Friend has no plans at present for further consultations but regular contact with the industry will be maintained.

Health Boards

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the remuneration for each health board chairman for the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The levels of remuneration paid to health board chairmen reflect their heavy burden of responsibility and time commitment, and take into account the variations in the size of boards. For the financial year 1989-90 they were:

Health board	Remuneration £ per annum
Greater Glasgow	18,594
Lothian	16,724
Grampian; Tayside	14,855
Lanarkshire; Argyll and Clyde	12,986
Ayr and Arran; Fife; Forth Valley; Highland	10,826
Borders; Dumfries and Galloway	8,655
Orkney; Shetland; Western Isles	5,299

Secondary Schools

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many secondary schools there are in each local education authority in Scotland; and how many are served by officially appointed school nurses.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the numbers of education authority secondary schools in Scotland is given in the table. Current guidance to health boards is that there should be a named nurse for each school.

Number of education authority secondary schools

	Number
Borders	9
Central	19
Dumfries and Galloway	16
Fife	19
Grampian	38
Highland	27
Lothian	51
Strathclyde	181
Tayside	32
Orkney	6
Shetland	9
Western Isles	16

School Library Books

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what average amount per pupil has been spent on school library books by Strathclyde regional council in each year since 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. The hon. Gentleman may wish to take up the matter with Strathclyde regional council.

Refugees

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which local authorities have applied, under section 210 of the Education Reform Act 1988, for a grant to *(a)* finance existing provision for refugees or displaced persons living in camps or reception centres and *(b)* to finance provision for 1991-92; how many of (a) and (b) have received a grant; what is the amount of grant allocated to each local authority; and if he will review the grant available for these purposes in the light of the increased number of asylum seekers entering the United Kingdom in 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: These provisions do not apply in Scotland.

David Elder Buildings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has issued any guidelines to Greater Glasgow health board about preferential disposal of the David Elder buildings to non-profit making community groups.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. My right hon. Friend has not yet confirmed closure of the David Elder hospital, and no guidelines on disposal have been issued.

Speech Therapy

106. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time speech therapists are employed in each health board in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table:

	Whole-time	Part-time	
		Whole-time equivalent	Number
Argyll and Clyde	24	8·0	16
Ayrshire and Arran	24	3·2	7
Borders	10	1·7	4
Dumfries and Galloway	13	4·1	6
Fife	25	2·8	7
Forth Valley	14	4·9	10
Grampian	36	10·2	22
Greater Glasgow	50	10·8	28
Highland	14	4·0	7
Lanarkshire	29	3·9	9
Lothian	41	15·3	27
Orkney	2	0·0	0
Shetland	1	0·0	0
Tayside	24	7·3	16
Western Isles	3	1·1	2
Scotland	310	77·3	161

It is for individual health boards to determine the number of speech therapists they require to employ after taking account of the needs of the population within their area.

Mentally Handicapped Children

107. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department compiles information about the support service needs, or provision, of profoundly mentally handicapped children.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not collected centrally.

Mortgage Repossessions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many actions for re-possession as a result of mortgage arrears there have been in *(a)* the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole, during each of the past 12 months for which records are available; and what were the average figures for each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available in the form requested. The Council of Mortgage Lenders publishes statistics in its regular newsletters on various aspects of mortgage lending by building societies but this is on a GB basis and no corresponding information is available for Scotland only. No information about other mortgage lenders is held centrally.

Social Services

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any requests from the Governments of central and eastern European countries concerning *(a)* the enactment of legislation concerning the provision of personal social services, *(b)* the setting-up of departments of social work and *(c)* the training and employment of social workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There have been no requests of the kind referred to.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to extend the period of training undertaken by those seeking to become registered social workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no procedure or requirement for the registration of social workers in the United Kingdom. I do not currently propose to extend the period for basic social work training.

Renaval Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received a substantive response from the European Commission to his submission of a programme under the terms of the European Community's Renaval programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Commission has written requesting further information. This is at present being prepared.

Primary School Testing

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last six months Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools addressed meetings of parents on the subject of primary school testing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools has addressed three meetings of parents in the last six months on the subject of primary school testing.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many school parent meetings in the Stirling parliamentary constituency were addressed in the last six months by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools; and what was the cost of these visits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools has addressed one meeting of parents within the Stirling parliamentary constituency on the subject of primary school testing; it lasted for two hours in an evening and the only costs incurred were £32 for travel and subsistence.

Renewable Electricity

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what encouragement is being given to small Scottish-based renewables generators of electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Under the Energy Act 1983, the Scottish electricity boards were obliged to purchase the output from independent generators in Scotland, at a price based

on the avoided cost to them of their marginal generation. The Electricity Act 1989 did not contain such an obligation; instead, both electricity boards agreed with the Secretary of State that they would continue to pay independent generators in Scotland in accordance with the Energy Act until five years after vesting, ie until 31 March 1995.

Following discussion with me and subject to any necessary competition clearance, ScottishPower (SP) and Scottish Hydro-Electric (HE) have offered to extend these arrangements. Under this extension, the companies have offered to buy the output from existing small Scottish renewables generators or those whose planning is far advanced at a price of 5·3p per unit. The companies have offered to buy a set amount of electricity each year—24 GWh per annum in the case of SP and 34 GWh in the case of HE. Payment will be made for each generator's net production of electricity. The rate payable will be gross, ie before use of system or any other such charges. The contracts will run from 1 July 1991 to 31 December 1998 and the price will be escalated by RPI during that period. More details about the arrangements will be made available by the two companies.

I welcome the decision made by the companies. The proposed scheme is consistent with the Government's wider environmental polices and will offer greater security to those covered by current contracts with SP and HE.

For the future the White Paper on the Environment announced that the Government would review its renewables programmes in 1991. The Government confirm that this review will consider the position of renewables in Scotland. The Government expect to make a further announcement about the review shortly, including the administrative arrangements for taking it forward. Scottish interests will be included in the associated consultative arrangements.

Inverclyde Enterprise Zone

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figure was added to the revenue support grant in respect of the exemption from rates of properties in the Inverclyde enterprise zone for 1990-91 and 1991-92; how the figure was calculated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* No addition is made to revenue support grant in respect of the exemption from rates enjoyed by properties in enterprise zones. Rating authorities are compensated separately and in full for losses of rate revenue in respect of properties in enterprise zones on the basis of audited returns from the authorities. Strathclyde regional council received advance payment of grant of £206,840 in respect of losses of rate revenue in the Inverclyde enterprise zone for 1990-91. A final claim in respect of 1990-91 and an advance claim in respect of 1991-92 have yet to be made.

Scottish Hydro-Electric plc

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with Scottish Hydro-Electric plc on measures to secure economic development and social improvement in the hydro catchment area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Scottish Hydro-Electric plc, alone among the Great Britain public electricity suppliers, has a condition in its licence—issued by the Secretary of State for Scotland on 28 March 1990—specifically requiring it to charge uniform tariffs throughout its area irrespective of remoteness. This very significant commitment is possible because the company has retained the bulk of the low cost hydro generation capacity and can use this to offset the higher unit transmission and distribution costs associated with the dispersed nature of the electricity supply system in the north of Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will direct Scottish Hydro-Electric plc to cease current accounting practices which exempt dams, tunnels, roads, associated stone buildings and other assets from depreciation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has made to Scottish Hydro-Electric plc regarding its current accounting practices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The types of asset to which the hon. Member refers have, for accounting purposes, infinite lives. They are expected, with appropriate maintenance, to last for as long as they are required. In addition, they are mainly capital investments dating from many years in the past. I have no intention of directing any change in the accounting policy which was explained in the company's annual reports and accounts for 1989-90, copies of which are in the House Library.

Local Authority Borrowing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has in train in respect of borrowing by Scottish local authorities following the recent judgment by the House of Lords in the case of Hazell *v.* the council of the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The Government's position was made clear by the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 7 May at columns *402-3*. Consequently I have no proposals to take any action on this issue.

Housing Improvements

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any funds from European community sources have gone to Glasgow district council for repairs or improvements to district council or private sector dwellings.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 17 April 1991]:* No.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Hostages

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in his efforts to secure the release of the British hostages in Lebanon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 24 April and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on 14 May.

EC Security Role

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards a security role for the European Community.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As part of the process of political union we envisage intensified co-operation of national positions among the Twelve on a range of security issues. We believe that defence issues should continue to be dealt with in the Western European Union and in NATO.

Mercenaries

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the international convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We decided not to sign the convention.

EMPLOYMENT

Offshore Installations

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether the Health and Safety Executive now requires all individuals on board an offshore installation to be issued with *(a)* a personal survival suit, *(b)* a smoke hood, *(c)* a life jacket, *(d)* a torch and *(e)* fireproof gloves;

(2) what steps he has taken since 1 April to satisfy himself as to the application and implementation of improvement and prohibition notices issued by the Health and Safety Executive;

(3) whether those offshore installations that had not had an evacuation, escape and rescue analysis carried out, as detailed in recommendation 76 of the Cullen report, have been instructed to do so;

(4) what steps have been taken since 1 April to ensure the application and implementation of improvement notices requiring offshore operators to complete evacuation, escape and rescue analyses;

(5) if he will make a statement on the application and implementation of improvement notices issued requiring the completion of smoke or gas ingress assessments as detailed in recommendation 60 of the Cullen report;

(6) what steps have been taken since 1 April to ensure the application and implementation of improvement notices issued to offshore operators requiring them to undertake fire risk analysis as detailed in recommendation 54 of the Cullen report;

(7) whether the Health and Safety Executive requires in writing offshore oil operators to carry out a smoke or gas ingress assessment as detailed in recommendation 60 of the Cullen report.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend attaches the highest priority to implementing the recommendations of the Cullen report. Accordingly, the Government have given the Health and Safety Commission the resources to achieve this and the necessary legislation and regulations will be presented to Parliament as soon as possible.

In addition, the representative bodies and companies in the offshore industry have been tasked with taking action on those of the recommendations which were primarily addressed to them. Since the transfer of offshore safety responsibilities to the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April it has been monitoring progress at regular meetings with the main industry associations and trade unions to ensure the earliest practicable implementation of the report.

Inspectors have had the power to serve improvement and prohibition notices offshore since 1977.

Pottery/Ceramic Industry

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers in the pottery/ceramic and allied industries are currently working a four-day and three-day week.

Mr. Jackson: There is no information available on the number of people working a four-day and three-day week. In the week ended 14 December 1990—the latest date for which reliable information is available—there were 29,000 operatives working short-time in the non-metallic mineral products industry in Great Britain. Separate figures for the pottery/ceramic and allied industries are not available.

Redundancies, North Staffordshire

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of notified redundancies for north Staffordshire since October 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Data are not available for north Staffordshire. The number of advance notifications of redundancies received since October 1990 for the west midlands region, which includes north Staffordshire, are given in the table:

Advance notifications of redundancies

	Number
1990	
October	4,317
November	3,805
December	2,877
1991	
January	5,576
February	5,645
March	7,242
April	4,247

Textile Industries

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have lost their jobs in the textile industries in *(a)* Blyth valley, *(b)* Northumberland and *(c)* the north-east in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The number of employees in the textile industries in the north—Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear—fell by 731 over the three months to December 1990. Estimates for areas within standard regions are available only from the census of employment and relate to September 1989.

Disability

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to ensure that residential assessment and rehabilitation are available to those

disabled people requiring these services, following the recent announcements on the closure of the majority of the employment rehabilitation centres.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Careers Service

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the organisations to which he circulated his Department's consultative paper on the future of the careers service.

Mr. Jackson: I have consulted with training and enterprise councils, local education authorities, the Association of County Councils, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and various other careers education and guidance organisations about the future of the careers service.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many organisations representing people with disabilities and learning difficulties were sent copies of his Department's consultative document on the future of the careers service.

Mr. Jackson: I have consulted with training and enterprise councils, local education authorities, the Association of County Councils, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and other relevant organisations about the future of the careers service. These are organisations which provide services for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to make an announcement on the future of the quota system and the need for anti-discrimination legislation to improve the employment prospects of people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Consultative Document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" discussed the role of legislation in improving the prospects of people with disabilities, including the future of the quota scheme and other approaches, such as anti-discrimination legislation. I am currently considering the many responses I have had on this issue.

Training Programmes

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the main training programmes and numbers involved for each of the last three years on offer to people in Coventry; how that is planned to change in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* It is not possible to provide information solely for the Coventry area.

The table shows the main training programmes on offer in the Coventry and Warwickshire area for each of the last three years and the numbers involved.

Coventry and Warwickshire training and enterprise council (TEC) have funds available to take forward initiatives that will provide a full range of training opportunities for both employed and unemployed, including those seeking to enter self-employment in the Coventry and Warwickshire area.

Coventry and Warwickshire

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Notes*	*Planned for 1991-92*
(1) Youth Training (YT)	6,434	5,998	4,802	Based on the average number in training, 1990-91 includes an estimate for national schemes	4,601
(2) Adult Training (AT)	5,694	2,761	1,927	Based on the average number in training	1,995
(3) Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	1,416	1,102	919	Based on actual numbers joining	600

Note: Changes in all of the programmes makes it impossible to make direct comparisons.

(1) YT:—One-year YT in 1988-89
—introduction of two-year YT in 1989-90
—national programmes influencing local provision
—increase in employer participation
—demographic downturn.

In 1991-92 eligibility has changed along with the length of the programme. TECs are contracted to guarantee places for all young people. People can enter YT up to 25 years of age.

(2) AT—In 1988-89 there were seven different programmes, with CP making up 3,357 places.
—All other years include ET and HTNT.

Eligibility has changed for ET in 1991-92 with a longer duration programme being possible, and the introduction of employed status. TECs are contracted to deliver for the long term unemployed.

(3) EAS:—programmes have changed, (ie, duration, and differential funding).

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons (Safety)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy that the safety standard required for any United Kingdom nuclear warhead design, under any circumstances, involved in an accidental nuclear explosion with a yield equivalent of 4lb of TNT, should be less than one in a million;

(2) what proportion of United Kingdom operationally deployed nuclear weapons are equipped with enhanced nuclear detonation safety devices;

(3) what proportion of United Kingdom operationally deployed nuclear weapons are equipped with fire-resistant pits.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that the safety standard required for any United Kingdom nuclear

warhead design, under any circumstances, involved in an accidental nuclear explosion with a yield equivalent to 4lb of TNT, should be less than one-in-a-million.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information relating to United Kingdom nuclear weapon design.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration the Nuclear Weapons Safety Panel has given to the United States House of Representatives December 1990 "Report of the Panel on Nuclear Weapons Safety of the Committee on the Armed Services".

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consideration he has given to the implications for United Kingdom operationally deployed nuclear weapons of the United States House of Representatives December 1990 "Report of the Panel on Nuclear Weapons Safety of the Committee on Armed Services";

(2) what consideration the Nuclear Weapons Safety Panel has given to the United States House of Representatives December 1990 "Report of the Panel on Nuclear Weapons Safety of the Committee on the Armed Services".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministry of Defence officials and members of the Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee have studied this report.

Trident D5

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had regarding United States plans for a redesign of the Trident D5 missile system.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the United States navy concerning potential redesign of the Trident D5 missile system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom maintains a close and continuous dialogue with the United States authorities regarding the Trident D5 missile system. I am not aware of any current plans by the United States to redesign this system.

Nuclear Weapons (Safety)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals comprise the Nuclear Weapons Safety Panel; and whether any of these individuals are external to his Department.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals comprise the Nuclear Weapons Safety Panel; and whether any of these individuals are external to his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are 20 permanent members of the Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee, 13 of whom are external to the Department.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *302*, whether the continuous safety review has led to a revision in the estimated risk of unintended nuclear detonation of any weapon in the United Kingdom nuclear stockpile.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's nuclear weapons continue to meet stringent safety standards endorsed by independent experts.

Submarines

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has recently held discussions with representatives of the Clyde Fishermen's Association and the United States navy concerning the movement of submarines through traditional fishing grounds in and around the Firth of Clyde; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I met representatives of the Clyde Fishermen's Association on 5 December 1990 to discuss their concerns about submarine operations in the Clyde area. In addition, the Royal Navy authorities on the Clyde, who maintain very close relations with the United States Navy with regard to operational matters, hold regular meetings with local fishermen and their representatives to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Thurleigh Airfield

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what price has been placed on the airfield at Thurleigh; when the site will be offered for sale; and what rate of return he expects to secure from its disposal.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our normal practice to disclose commercially sensitive information about valuations and prospective returns from the disposal of surplus defence land. Our aim is to offer the RAE Bedford airfield site for disposal as soon as possible.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what time will be required to complete the removal of facilities and equipment from Thurleigh airfield to Boscombe Down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The precise timetable for the relocation of facilities and equipment from the RAE Bedford airfield site will emerge only from the detailed planning now being set in hand. Our aim is to move expeditiously; but this will still take a number of years to complete.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of the totality of land held at Thurleigh airfield, Bedfordshire, what acreage will continue to be held by his Department and agencies and what will be available for disposal, following his recent decision on the future of the airfield.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We intend to offer for disposal the RAE Bedford airfield site in its entirety save for a small enclave which we envisage will be retained to house a simulator facility.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to retain the freehold of Thurleigh airfield and grant leases to potential buyers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is our normal practice to dispose of the freehold of sites for which we no longer have a defence requirement.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he proposes to balance the return on investment at the Thurleigh airfield with the environmental considerations of the residents of north Bedfordshire.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We intend to follow the normal planning procedures in disposing of the RAE Bedford airfield. In so doing, the intention would be to agree an appropriate planning brief with the local planning authorities concerned. This will take due account of relevant environmental issues.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what scale of development of a commercial, non-passenger airfield is envisaged in his preliminary assessment for Thurleigh airfield.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It would be premature at this stage to speculate about the possible scale of any development of the RAE Bedford airfield site as a commercial (non-passenger) airfield. This will emerge from the detailed work now being set in hand, including consultation with the local planning authorities concerned.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current written down value of Thurleigh airfield.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Our valuation of the RAE Bedford airfield site is commercial-in-confidence.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he proposes to dispose of any part of the Thurleigh airfield *(a)* for agricultural purposes, *(b)* for industrial and commercial use, *(c)* for housing and *(d)* as a recreational park.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No decisions have been made on future uses for the RAE Bedford airfield site. We have already indicated our preliminary assessment of a commercial flying option; we now intend to explore this and other possible uses in more detail with the local planning authorities concerned.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he proposes to dispose of the Thurleigh airfield site as a single operation or in a number of separate parcels.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The precise nature of the disposal will emerge from the detailed work now being put in hand, including consultation with the local planning authorities concerned but our current view is that a fragmented disposal should be avoided if possible.

Middle East

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he is holding with his United States counterparts on preventing the export of ballistic missile technology to the middle east.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministers and senior officials from interested Whitehall departments are fully engaged with their United States counterparts on this important subject.

NATO

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role he envisages for the Royal Air Force in the proposed NATO ready-deployment structure.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following the changes now under way, the RAF—though smaller—will retain the full range of capabilities currently committed to NATO. Work on NATO's strategy review is continuing, but aircraft are intrinsically capable of rapid deployment.

RAF Leeming

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the main works undertaken at RAF Leeming to enable the deployment of Tornado aircraft to take place there; and whether they included any extension to the main runway.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The main works undertaken at RAF Leeming were associated with the upgrading of the station's utilities, the enhancement of technical accommodation, married quarter developments and the construction of airfield survival measures, which included hardened aircraft shelters and command and control centres. The runway was resurfaced and re-profiled, but no extension work was undertaken.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the main uses of Royal Air Force Leeming in the 10 years prior to the deployment of Tornado aircraft there; and what were the principal types of aircraft that were based there or used at the air station regularly during that period.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Tornado aircraft were deployed to RAF Leeming in 1988. From 1978 until 1984 RAF Leeming's main role was as a flying training station operating Bulldog and Jet Provost aircraft. Jetstream aircraft operated there between 1978 and 1979. Throughout the period an air experience flight of Chipmunk aircraft and a university air squadron of Bulldogs also operated from the station—and continue to do so—except for a break during 1987 and 1988 while the runway was being rebuilt.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 May 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Court of Protection

Mr. Steen: To ask the Attorney-General what was the annual fee income of the Court of Protection in 1988-89 and 1989-90.

The Attorney-General: The annual fee income, including fees for receiverships undertaken by the public trustee for the court, was £5,764,111 for the year ended 31 March 1989 and £6,474,982 for the year ended 31 March 1990.

Juveniles (Prosecutions)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases involving juveniles the Crown prosecution service decided not to prosecute on grounds of welfare.

The Attorney-General: The Crown prosecution service does not collect statistics separately for cases involving juveniles whether as defendants, victims or witnesses. Such information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is, however, the policy of the Crown prosecution service to take into account, as one but only one of the relevant factors, the welfare of a juvenile, in deciding whether it is appropriate to institute or continue a prosecution.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will consider seeking to amend the law in the light of the court decision overruling the wishes of a 12-year-old girl's mother as to whether the daughter should have an abortion; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No. Where a child is a ward of court the High Court assumes parental responsibility including the duty to give or withhold consent to medical procedures. In discharging that duty the court must act as a good parent and treat the welfare of the child as the overriding consideration. The law governing the care and upbringing of children has been recently reformed by the Children Act 1989 which is expected to come into force in October this year. It will not prevent a court from overriding parental wishes in matters relating to children where their welfare is at risk, but it would be premature to make further changes in this area of the law until we have had a chance to see how that Act operates in practice.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Environmental Provision Committee

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the committee to make recommendations on the future development of environmental provision within further and higher education will be established; and what will be its terms of reference.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to announce the membership and terms of reference of this committee within the next few weeks.

Head Teachers (Extra Payments)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will name those schools in Humberside where the governors have used new powers available to them to make extra payments to heads and deputies; and how much was involved in each case.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not available centrally.

Primary Schools (Governors' Reports)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received over the holding of meetings in primary schools to discuss governors' reports to parents, in particular concerning the level of attendance at such meetings.

Mr. Fallon: The Department has received a number of letters about the low level of attendance at annual parents' meetings held at primary and secondary schools since this requirement was introduced in 1987.

VAT

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the cost to universities in 1991-92 of the increase in the rate of VAT to 17·5 per cent.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The gross additional cost to the universities of the increase has been estimated at some £30 to £35 million. A significant proportion of this should be recoverable through increased output charges.

Temporary School Buildings

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what procedures he adopts for review of lifespan of semi-permanent or temporary school buildings in areas of stable or growing school population.

Mr. Fallon: It is for local education authorities and others directly responsible for the schools to satisfy themselves as to the state of their school buildings. In distributing annual capital guidelines to local education authorities, and in giving capital allocations to the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools, my right hon. and learned Friend makes no distinction between permanent, semi-permanent or temporary buildings.

National Coaching Foundation

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his announcement of 11 March regarding funding of the National Coaching Foundation coaching scheme for school children, what is the total number of school children proposed to take part in this scheme expressed *(a)* numerically and *(b)* as a percentage of the total number of school children at maintained schools in England; what is the total number of local education authority areas from which children will be selected expressed (1) numerically and (2) as a percentage of the total number of local education

authority areas in England; and for what length of time the scheme will last expressed (A) numerically and (B) as a percentage of the standard school term.

Mr. Atkins: The National Coaching Foundation's champion coaching project will involve about 3,600 children in 20 local education authority areas in England. This represents 0·2 per cent. of children aged 11 to 14 in maintained schools and 18 per cent. of LEAs. The aim of this pilot project is to establish examples of good practice for use in other areas. The scheme will last for eight to 10 weeks and will be complementary to the school curriculum. School terms are determined by LEAs or governing bodies for voluntary aided schools. Although all schools are bound to meet certain requirements, the organisation of terms is locally governed.

Olympic Games

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many meetings he has held with the organisers of the British Olympic bid since the British Olympic Association's announcement of Manchester's winning bid; what further plans he has to meet the organisers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his answer on 1 May to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I am ready to discuss how best the Government can help to promote the bid. I have already spoken to Robert Scott, the chairman of the Manchester Olympic bid. Arrangements have been made for me to meet both Mr. Scott and the BOA.

Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, 7 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *212*, if he will publish a table setting out separately the level of grant in aid to the Sports Council given or proposed for each of the years 1986-87 to 1990-91 and the level of support for sport provided through the urban programme for each of the years 1986-87 to 1990-91 together with the level of grant the Sports Council would have received and the level of support which would have been provided through the urban programme for each of these years had funding been uprated in line with inflation.

Mr. Atkins: The level of grant in aid to the Sports Council and the figures uprated by the GDP index are:

Year	*(£ million)* *Sports Council Grant*	*Uprated by GDP Index*
1986-87[1]	37·4	37·4
1987-88[1]	37·1	39·4
1988-89[1]	39·0	42·3
1989-90[1]	41·9	45·0
1990-92[2]	44·7	48·5

[1] Outturn.
[2] Estimated outturn.

Over the same period the Sports Council has increased its receipts from £5·46 million (outturn) to £10·95 million (estimated outturn). When receipts are added to grant in aid, funds available to the council have increased in line with inflation.

Expenditure on sport through the Department of the Environment's urban programme and the figures uprated by the GDP index are:

Year	*(£ million)* *Urban Programme Funding*	*Uprated by GDP Index*
1986-87[1]	21·3	21·3
1987-88[1]	25·2	22·4
1988-89[1]	17·8	24·1
1989-90[1]	15·5	25·6
1990-91[2]	15·7	27·6

[1] Outturn.
[2] Estimated outturn.

These figures reflect the increased emphasis within the urban programme on economic, rather than social, projects. Most projects involving expenditure on sport would occur in the latter category.

HMI Reports

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of *(a)* school-related and *(b)* non school-related reports published by Her Majesty's inspectorate in each of the last two years; and if he will indicate the cost of publication.

Mr. Eggar: In 1988-89, 403 inspection reports were published, of which 231 were related to schools. In 1989-90, 358 reports were published, of which 144 were school-related. Her Majesty's inspectorate reports are printed and published by the Department, on behalf of the Secretary of State, and costs are currently not itemised within the Department's total printing budget.

National Curriculum

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he expects to publish a draft order to introduce a short course in geography within key stage 4 of the national curriculum;

(2) when he expects to publish proposals to put into effect his policy of permitting pupils to take either history or geography at key stage 4 of the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today published for consultation a draft order with an associated document setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for a short course in geography in the national curriculum for pupils at key stage 4, as I am required to do by section 20(5) of the Education Reform Act 1988. Copies have been placed in the Library.

In publishing the initial statutory order and document for geography before Easter, I announced that I would be bringing forward shortly this further draft order, which builds on advice sent to me by the National Curriculum Council last November.

I have accepted the basic structure of the course recommended by the council, although I have made changes to reduce its content to make it more manageable and to provide an element of choice within the material relating to physical and human geography.

Therefore, in accordance with section 20(5)(a)(ii) of the Education Reform Act 1988, I have published a statement of my reasons for departing from the council's advice. Copies have been placed in the Library with those of the draft order.

The period for consultation on the draft order will end on 31 July 1991. I intend to make the final order in October 1991 in time to allow for the planning of syllabuses and courses for pupils at key stage 4 which will begin in the autumn of 1994. The draft order applies only to England. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be publishing separately for consultation a draft order to introduce a short course in geography in Wales.

The National Curriculum Council, as required by section 20(3) of the Education Reform Act 1988, has today given notice of my proposal for making the full history and geography courses alternatives for pupils at key stage 4. I announced my intention of issuing such a proposal in January. Copies of my proposal have been placed in the Library.

My proposal is that pupils who elect to follow the full course in history at key stage 4 of the national curriculum should be excepted from the provisions of the national curriculum for geography and that, similarly, pupils who elect to follow the full course in geography should be excepted from the provisions of the national curriculum in history. Pupils will thus be able to meet the minimum requirement of the national curriculum by taking the full course in either history or geography, or by taking the short courses in both subjects.

It is our view, however, that virtually all schools should offer both the full and the short courses in both subjects and should give pupils a choice between full history, full geography or short history and short geography. I expect many schools to offer pupils the opportunity to study history and geography in ways that exceed the minimum requirement.

The period for the submission of evidence and representations in the proposals to the National Curriculum Council will end on 31 July 1991. The council will then report to me. I intend to publish draft regulations, as required by section 20(5) of the Act, in October 1991. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is separately directing the statutory consultation process in Wales.

TRANSPORT

Slow Drivers

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had concerning the practice of drivers on dual carriageways and motorways which have long queues of slow-moving traffic who leave long gaps in the traffic and decline to close up on the vehicles ahead of them; and whether he will consider proposals to make it illegal because of the delays caused to drivers who wish to turn off the dual carriageways and motorways as part of their normal journey.

Mr. Chope: Although we have had no formal representations on the particular practice to which my right hon. Friend refers, trials of signing arrangements to encourage traffic to use both lanes on the approaches to road works have been carried out on sections of the A1 north of Doncaster and in North Yorkshire. The police can take action within their current powers against drivers whose vehicles cause unnecessary obstruction of the highway.

Roads

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of land area of England is *(a)* currently covered by road and *(b)* will be covered by roads by the end of the century based on current plans.

Mr. Chope: A precise figure is not available, but the percentage for 1990 is estimated to be between 1·2 and 1·5 per cent. It is not expected that this percentage will change significantly during the next 10 years.

The figure has been arrived at by taking known information on the length of roads in England and multiplying by an estimated average width. The data are as follows:

	Length (miles)	*Width (ft)*	*Area (miles²)*
Motorway	1,672	70	22
Trunk	5,083	33	32
Principal	15,439	26	76
B, C, Unclassified	147,456	20	560
			690

The land area of England is 50,363 miles²

$$\frac{690}{50,363} \times 100 = 1{\cdot}37 \text{ per cent.}$$

Assumptions have been made about the average width of roads—particularly for minor roads. The percentage range given in the answer allows for the width of minor roads to be between 17 and 23 ft.

Nuclear Fuel (Shipment)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the transport of spent nuclear fuel into ports in the United Kingdom on roll-on, roll-off ferries.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. Such cargoes are carried to United Kingdom ports on ro-ro ferries only in limited quantities, in flasks approved to standards set by the International Atomic Energy Authority, when they are engaged on "freight only" voyages. International regulations are under consideration at IMO which would make United Kingdom practice mandatory.

Severe Winter Weather

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department's review of the arrangements for dealing with severe winter weather will be completed.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department's review of the current arrangements for dealing with severe winter weather, which I announced to the House on 10 December, *Hansard* col 685, has now been completed; I am placing a copy of the report in the Library of the House.

The review has included consultation with the French, Dutch, German, Swiss, Danish and Swedish railways, and with highway authorities in France and Denmark, as well as with the Scottish Office Environment Department and in England with the police, with the Department's agents for highway maintenance, and with British Rail.

The review finds that in the period of 7 to 9 December serious problems were caused, particularly in the midlands and the north, by a combination of strong winds and

heavy, sticky snow which caused power lines and trees to collapse, blocking many roads and railways, and causing widespread power failures. The heavy drifting snow, exacerbated by heavy rain immediately beforehand which washed away much of the salt that had been spread in anticipation, quickly trapped vehicles, blocking roads and hampering ploughing operations. The conditions were exceptional; the Met Office suggest they may occur only once every 15 to 20 years.

Over the weekend of 9 and 10 February, temperatures were extremely low and snow was again heavy in several regions. This time the snow was light and dry, which is not common in Britain. Motorways and trunk roads were generally kept open. However, serious problems were experienced on parts of the railway network; the blown powdery snow was able to enter mechanical and electrical equipment, and the low temperatures caused equipment to freeze up. Damage to 455 electric train motors meant that it took three weeks for Network SouthEast services to get back to normal.

Our review of European comparisons shows that other countries also suffered severe disruption. On the roads other countries generally fared no better in dealing with similar conditions. For instance, in Belgium traffic was brought to "a virtual standstill" on 12 February in the Brussels and Antwerp regions in particular. In Germany on 15 and 16 February there was "a total breakdown of traffic throughout the Federal Republic", with tailbacks of more than 100 km. And in Holland on 15 February "traffic everywhere was snarled up", with about 13 jams totalling around 90 km.

The severe spells also caused considerable immediate disruption to rail services. For example, in Holland there was serious disruption to services on 8 February and their emergency timetable was implemented. In France, powder snow got into the convertors of the RER trains in Paris and caused a complete line to close. In Germany, Frankfurt Main station was virtually cut off on 15 February, and elsewhere delays of up to three hours were quite frequent. In Denmark, there were major problems with the Copenhagen suburban services, with some 300 out of 500 trains being put out of service as a result of traction motor failures.

We are acting on the lessons provided by these experiences and what we have learnt from other countries. One lesson is that rail services in other countries visited, apart from Denmark, appear to have got back to normal faster than in Britain on this occasion.

A lesson that is common to both roads and railways is the need to improve communications systems and equipment, including an ability to continue functioning through a prolonged power failure. Better communications are needed within the relevant authorities, with travellers who are already on the road or rail system and with intending travellers before they set off.

Specific improvements on the roads include a sharpening up of the arrangements to remove broken down vehicles, on which we did well in the February episode; an examination of the operational readiness of equipment; and a review of the levels of manpower and salt available to deal with possible longer spells of extreme conditions. We shall be considering with the emergency services procedures for helping vehicle occupants trapped during severe conditions. It is planned to have these actions substantially complete before the next winter. We shall also review operational procedures in the light of practice overseas, including the rate of spread of salt and the level of selectivity in salting roads; and we shall examine additional sources of manpower and equipment —we found that both France and Denmark make greater use of contractors and farmers than we do.

On the railways, operational responsibility lies with British Rail. We found that railways that used sliding doors experienced similar problems to BR; but most European railways use plug doors, and had no problems. BR now intends all the new types of stock to have plug doors. Our study also showed that other railways made more extensive use of point heaters; BR now has a programme to install many more modern point heaters. BR also now intends to test the first production vehicle of all new fleets for temperature extremes, which was the general practice of the railways visited. We also established that diesel fuel can be obtained, at a premium, that can cope with lower temperatures than that presently used by BR—down to minus 22 deg C (Germany), minus 25 deg C (Holland) or even minus 32 deg C (Sweden); BR is now examining the cost-effectiveness of this.

Other improvements being examined in the light of what we learnt overseas, to see if they would be cost-effective in this country, include modifications to existing sliding doors, preventing electric motors from failing as a result of powder snow getting into them and using covers on automatic couplers. British Rail is updating its guidance to staff on how to keep equipment working and services running in severe winter weather. It is also preparing emergency service plans, to be published in advance. These will improve communications with the customer. It will also be introducing a pilot real time information system on two routes this summer.

I shall continue to monitor progress, and I shall make a further report to the House in due course.

Bermuda 3 Agreement

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had regarding a Bermuda 3 agreement on aviation matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Preliminary discussions have taken place with the United States about possibilities for further liberalisation of transatlantic air services. Talks will be resumed later in the year. No timetable has been set for their completion.

Ilminster Bypass

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the final cost for building the Ilminster bypass (A303).

Mr. Chope: The cost of the construction works was £21·23 million. Compensation for land acquisition and other property matters is estimated to cost a further £1·5 million at 1991 prices.

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his estimate is for the cost of dualling the Ilminster bypass.

Mr. Chope: Preliminary estimates range from about £20 million to over £30 million depending on the manner in which the dualling might be carried out.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his findings with regard to the provision of a channel tunnel high-speed rail link from Malling, Kent, to central London termini; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend gave to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) on 9 May, Vol. 190, col *545*.

The Minch (Contingency Plans)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the contingency plans to deal with the foundering of an oil tanker in the Minch; if he will place a copy of the plans in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The foundering of a tanker in the Minch would be dealt with in the same way as it would anywhere in United Kingdom waters and the response would have to be tailored to the particular circumstances of the incident. The marine pollution control unit MPCU is responsible for dealing with pollution at sea. Coastal local authorities are responsible for preparing detailed clean-up contingency plans for their particular coastlines and for dealing with pollution that comes ashore, supported by the MPCU as necessary.

MPCU resources, full details of which are already available in the House of Commons Library, are pre-positioned at strategic locations in the United Kingdom to permit rapid response to any part of the coast and there are no plans related to specific areas. MPCU remote-sensing and dispersant-spraying aircraft are based at Inverness and would be immediately reinforced by the MPCU remote-sensing and dispersant-spraying aircraft based at Coventry in the event of a major incident in the Minch. MPCU at sea oil recovery equipment, nearest at Aberdeen, and specialist beach cleaning equipment, nearest at Stirling, would be mobilised and further resources obtained as necessary from MPCU stockpiles, United Kingdom commercial sources and from other North sea countries under the terms of the Bonn Agreement.

The Western Isles island council and the Highland regional council are responsible for the coastline in the immediate area of the Minch and have each prepared detailed oil spill contingency plans for dealing with pollution which comes ashore on their beaches. It is for them to determine the availability of their plans.

These MPCU and local authority arrangements for responding to major pollution incidents in the Minch were successfully tested in the MPCU live counter-pollution exercise MINCHEX which was carried out on 4 and 5 May 1990.

Taxi Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to protect public safety by ensuring that taxi licences are granted only to fit and proper persons.

Mr. McLoughlin: Outside London district councils license taxi drivers and it is for those councils to undertake what measures they consider appropriate to ensure that licences are granted only to fit and proper persons.

In London, where the licensing of taxi drivers is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, the assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan police, who licenses taxi drivers on his behalf, carries out the checks that he considers necessary to satisfy himself that the applicant is of good character and fit to act as a taxi driver; these include a medical check and a check of any past criminal convictions.

Value for Money

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will have discussions with the Audit Commission about ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of relevant activities which fall within the responsibility of his Department with a view to securing better value for money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 15 May 1991]:* I welcome the studies which the Audit Commission has carried out in areas for which the Department of Transport has policy responsibility and the Department will co-operate fully with future studies.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on how many occasions consideration has been given to whether conflicts of interest have arisen in the case of persons appointed to the post of marketing consultant to Property Services Agency projects;

(2) what is the fee paid per day to N. A. Batchelor for acting as a marketing consultant to Property Services Agency projects;

(3) what steps were taken to ensure that civil service guidelines were fully complied with in the appointment of N. A. Batchelor as a marketing consultant to Property Services Agency projects;

(4) what is his policy on delegating responsibility to the Property Services Agency's chief executive and accounting officer of responsibility for the appointment of all marketing consultants to Property Services Agency projects;

(5) when N. A. Batchelor was appointed as a marketing consultant to Property Services Agency projects;

(6) what outside advice he took before N. A. Batchelor was appointed to the post of marketing consultant to Property Services Agency projects;

(7) what representations he has received as to the appointment of persons to the post of marketing consultants to Property Services Agency projects;

(8) what steps he took to ensure that there was no family connection between the Property Services Agency projects marketing manager and any marketing consultants to Property Services Agency projects.

Mr. Yeo: Following the decision of the Property Services Agency projects board to establish a separate sales organisation to help secure the commercial future of the business, immediate advice was required on

organisational and other issues. Mr. N. A. Batchelor, who is the husband of the Property Services Agency projects marketing manager, had previously approached Property Services Agency projects' management to offer his services as a marketing consultant. He was appointed at the end of January to produce a report and to carry out some supplementary follow-up work. The commission, which has now been completed, amounted to 19 days in total and he was paid £400 per day.

The chief executive and accounting officer for Property Services Agency services is responsible for the appointment of all consultants. He in turn delegates responsibility to his top management in each of the businesses. Although the Department's normal practice is to appoint consultants after competition, single tender action was taken to appoint Mr. Batchelor, but this was only because the requirement was seen as urgent.

It is not the Department's general practice to seek outside advice when making such appointments and none was sought on this occasion.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors underlay the change in the level of domestic rate rebates between 1987-88 and 1989-90; and what figure he has assumed in calculating rebates on the amount of council tax.

Mr. Key: Many factors underlay the changed levels of domestic rate rebates between 1987-88 and 1989-90. These include the reforms of the benefits system introduced in April 1988, the introduction of the community charge in Scotland from 1989, and the change in the actual level of rate bills resulting from spending decisions of local authorities.

The Government have proposed that the maximum rebate for individuals or couples on income support or equivalent levels of income will be 100 per cent. of the council tax.

No assumptions about rebates were needed to produce the illustrative council tax figures issued on 23 April.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the proposed 25 per cent. reduction in the council tax for people living alone; and if he will consider increasing it to 50 per cent. when he brings forward legislation.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* We have received a number of representations on aspects of the council tax, including the level of the discount. The basic council tax bill for a couple represents half property, half personal element. The Government take the view that this is the appropriate balance between the two elements. Increasing the personal discount to 50 per cent. would mean that, if an empty property attracted two personal discounts, as we propose, it would not be liable for any council tax.

Council House Sales

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of (i) freehold and (ii) leasehold homes sold by local authorities to sitting tenants in 1989 and 1990 nationally and regionally; what was the average selling price and the average discount on the market place; and if he will give separate figures for flats and other dwellings;

(2) what is the average selling prices of council flats and semi-detached houses to sitting tenants in each English region, Scotland and Wales, and what are the corresponding average market values.

Mr. Yeo: The available information is given in the table. I refer the hon. Member to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales for Scottish and Welsh data.

Table 1
Local authority sales to sitting tenants (full ownership) 1989-90

Region	Numbers of sales: houses	Numbers of sales: flats	Discounted selling price (houses+flats)	Market price: houses	Market price: flats	Average discount (houses+flats) per cent.
North (inc Cumbria)	12,600	600	10,200	21,600	19,200	51
Yorks/Humberside	19,100	800	11,100	22,300	19,000	50
East Midlands	9,700	800	15,700	33,200	26,900	50
East Anglia	2,300	500	23,900	51,600	45,600	53
London	7,900	19,200	25,800	67,900	55,500	57
South East	13,800	5,100	27,500	60,800	49,900	53
South West	7,500	1,700	21,900	47,900	40,100	53
West Midlands	16,600	1,700	15,000	31,500	24,600	51
North West	16,000	700	11,500	23,300	19,500	50
England	105,500	31,100	18,100	35,300	48,900	53

Table 2
Local authority sales to sitting tenants (full ownership) 1990-91

Region	Numbers of sales: houses	Numbers of sales: flats	Discounted selling price (houses+flats)	Market price: houses	Market price: flats	Average discount (houses+flats)
North (inc Cumbria)	8,900	600	n.a.	25,400	22,200	n.a.
Yorks/Humberside	9,700	900	n.a.	27,900	22,200	n.a.
East Midlands	4,000	600	n.a.	36,300	28,200	n.a.
East Anglia	1,300	300	n.a.	49,200	44,800	n.a.
London	4,700	14,000	n.a.	72,300	62,000	n.a.
South East	6,600	2,600	n.a.	62,900	52,100	n.a.
South West	2,800	800	n.a.	52,400	41,300	n.a.
West Midlands	8,600	1,700	n.a.	35,700	25,500	n.a.
North West	10,900	900	n.a.	26,400	22,600	n.a.
England	57,500	22,300	n.a.	38,000	52,600	n.a.

n.a. not yet available

Protected Landscape

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the land area of England is now covered by national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, sites of special scientific interest, green belt, or other classifications of protected landscape; and what were the equivalent figures for 1980.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

	1980		1991	
	Area (ha²)	*Percentage area of England*	*Area (ha²)*	*Percentage area of England*
National parks	942,900	7·20	942,900	7·20
The Broads	0	0·00	28,800	0·20
Areas of outstanding natural beauty	1,430,700	11·00	1,898,200	14·50
Sites of special scientific interest	648,198	5·00	760,210	6·00
Green belt	[1]720,000	5·50	1,520,000	12·00
National nature reserves	28,674	0·20	41,312	0·30
Special protection areas	0	0·00	109,194	0·80
Ramsar sites	18,803	0·15	115,463	0·90

[1] Figures for 1979.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many designated sites of special scientific interest are in existence currently; and how many there were in 1980.

Mr. Baldry: On 28 February 1991, there were 5,649 sites of special scientific interest. On 28 March 1980, there were 3,826 notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. These sites have, for the most part, been re-notified under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Water Meters

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has had any discussions with the water regulator regarding enabling people on low incomes to spread the cost of water meter installation in domestic premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The director general's consultation paper "Paying for Water" suggests companies should be prepared to offer customers a facility for meeting the costs of voluntary domestic meter installation over a period of years. OFWAT is currently analysing responses to the consultation paper and the director general intends to issue guidelines to water companies towards the end of the year.

Environmental Assessment

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the response of Her Majesty's Government to their consultation document entitled "Environmental Assessment and Private Bill Procedures", published on 26 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We have received 35 responses to the consultation paper, most of which welcome, and none of which object to, the principle of requiring environmental assessment for private Bills for works projects. A list of responses has been sent to the Libraries of both Houses and copies of the responses have been placed in the Department of the Environment library at Marsham street.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will lay before the House a draft order under section 104 of the Local Government (Finance) Act 1988 setting out his decisions on the final caps of the authorities which he designated for capping.

Mr. Heseltine: I have today laid before the House a draft order, under section 104 of the 1988 Act, setting out my decisions on the final caps of the eight authorities which did not accept the caps that I proposed for them and put forward alternative amounts. Six authorities—Greenwich, Langbaurgh, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Reading and Somerset—accepted and I have in each case confirmed the caps for these authorities at the level originally proposed.

For the authorities in the draft order I have decided, after taking account of all the relevant information, including the new information which has been made available since I made my initial decisions, to confirm the caps for Basildon, Ipswich, Norwich and Stoke-on-Trent at the level which I initially proposed. I have decided to increase Bristol's cap by £1·5 million, Lambeth's by £3·9 million, Warwickshire's by £2·8 million and Wirral's by £3·2 million. I am satisfied that the caps I have now decided are in all cases reasonable, appropriate and achievable. The caps for each of the designated authorities and the resulting reduction in charges are as follows:

Authority	*Final Cap £ million*	*Reduction in charge £*
Basildon	22·1	39
Bristol	54·9	15
Greenwich	213·0	16
Ipswich	16·0	15
Lambeth	311·17	25
Langbaurgh	15·6	6
Middlesbrough	20·2	7
Milton Keynes	20·2	16
Norwich	15·0	16
Reading	17·7	10
Somerset	272·5	6
Stoke-on-Trent	25·8	11
Warwickshire	275·1	9
Wirral	238·3	32

Trespass

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to introduce stronger powers to curb the abuse through trespass and damage to property and public land by itinerants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

Anyone who causes damage to property can be prosecuted under the Criminal Damage Act 1971. Under section 1 of the Criminal Damage Act 1971 it is an offence, punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, or life in the case of arson, to destroy or damage recklessly or intentionally any property belonging to another person without lawful excuse. Under section 3 of the Act it is an offence to possess anything with the intent to destroy or damage property. The police have the power to arrest any person whom they reasonably suspect has committed or is about to commit an offence of criminal damage. Simple trespass is a civil matter, but in certain circumstances, where trespass is accompanied by aggravating factors, including damage to property on the land, section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 applies. The Government have recently reviewed section 39 and will announce their conclusions very soon.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

African Relief

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will allocate additional new funds for emergency relief in Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: On 22 April I announced in the House a new pledge of £33 million emergency relief assistance for Africa, col. *299*. I am currently discussing the detailed allocation of these funds with British and international relief agencies.

Since September 1990 Britain has provided £90 million emergency relief assistance for African countries, including 158,000 tonnes of food aid. We intend to continue to respond speedily and effectively to the needs of famine-affected countries in Africa.

I assured the House on 14 May, col. *220*, that Britain would continue to play its full part in the international relief effort to help alleviate the terrible suffering in Africa, as well as to assist the people of Bangladesh to reconstruct their lives.

Sport-as-Aid

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of resources, and what consideration, he has given to the implementation of sport-as-aid packages as part of development aid to disadvantaged groups and for developing the sports infrastructure of recipient countries; if he will make it his policy to develop further such packages; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The provision of sports infrastructure has not featured significantly in our bilateral aid programme. We have found that neither poor people nor their Governments give high priority to using aid for such purposes, although they can be part of health or education projects. Our basic priority is to use aid to increase the productive capabilities of people in developing countries and we do not expect any change in this.

We have occasionally funded small contributions to sports and other cultural developments through the heads of mission gift scheme, however. A recent gift was for South African black townships. We are also providing aid to match contributions by local people for sports equipment within slum improvement projects in India.

WALES

Dental Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the progress reports submitted by each district health authority to his Department on their reviews of the community dental services.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have placed in the Library of the House copies of progress reports produced by Welsh health authorities on their reviews of the community dental services as presented for the Department's annual review of performance in 1990.

National Curriculum

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when he intends to introduce proposals to make the full courses in history and geography alternatives in key stage 4;

(2) when he will publish a draft order to introduce a reduced course for geography in the national curriculum at key stage 4.

Mr. David Hunt: I have published today a draft supplementary order with an associated document setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for a reduced course in geography in the national curriculum at key stage 4. Copies of the documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

I am consulting widely on the draft as required by section 21(3) of the Education Reform Act 1988. The period for consultation will end on 31 July 1991. I intend to make the final order in October 1991 to allow ample time for the planning of syllabuses and courses. The statutory requirements for geography in the national curriculum in key stage 4 take effect from autumn 1994. I have also published today proposals to give effect to my intention that the full courses for history and geography in the national curriculum are alternatives at key stage 4. Consultation upon the proposals is the first stage in the procedure set out in section 21 of the Education Reform Act to make regulations under section 17 of that Act. Copies of the proposals have been placed in the Library of the House.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will be publishing separately a draft order to introduce a reduced course for geography in England and his proposals in respect of history and geography in key stage 4.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Force, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any further plans to increase the police establishment in Leicestershire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has approved an increase of 13 posts for the Leicestershire constabulary with effect from 1 October 1991. The police authority has also made an application for a further 27 police officers in 1992-93 which, with the advice of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, is being considered along with applications from other police authorities.

Referendum (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he received for a referendum from the Isle of Wight county council.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next intends to meet representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss making available the criminal records of taxi licence applicants to district councils.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Discussions between the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers on this, and other questions of disclosure from criminal record, will take place as part of the formal consideration of the recommendations of the scrutiny of criminal records which reported at the end of April.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to respond to the report "Non-Disclosure of Criminal Convictions", issued by the Association of District Councils, with respect to the granting of taxi licences to persons with criminal records; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office officials have written to the Association of District Councils. We are considering the question of access to criminal records in connection with the licensing of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers in the context of the response to the scrutiny of criminal recors which reported in April.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal offences have been committed by taxi drivers against their passengers in each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: It is not possible from the information held centrally to identify the number of offences committed by taxi drivers against their passengers.

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to enable district councils to have access to police records when considering applications for taxi licences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are considering this issue in the context of the response to the scrutiny of criminal records which reported in April.

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for taxi licences have been prosecuted for not declaring criminal records.

Mr. John Patten: It is not possible from the information held centrally to identify the number of applicants for taxi licences who have been prosecuted for not declaring criminal records.

Mr. Sadaf Hussain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where in his Department the files Y24263, B459500 and K385506 are currently held; if he will release the passports of Mr. Sadaf Hussain (date of birth 15-2-1969, passport No. L682432F) and his wife; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These files are presently held in the asylum division of the immigration and nationality department. The subjects of these files were granted exceptional leave to remain on 7 May and their passports were returned to their legal representatives on that day. The passports of Mr. Sadaf Hussain—subject of file reference H354158—and his wife were returned to their legal representatives on 13 May. Mrs. Hussain has been granted indefinite leave to remain.

Prisons (Security Alerts)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for the last 12 months the dates on which each of Her Majesty's closed prison establishments were put on maximum security alert; for what reasons; and what were the results obtained;

(2) if he will list for the last 12 months the dates on which each of Her Majesty's open prison establishments were put on maximum security alert; for what reasons; and what were the results obtained.

Mrs. Rumbold: The term "maximum security alert" is not one used in prisons. Incidents recorded centrally between 9 May 1990 and 8 May 1991 which (1) involved a full search of the prison, or (2) presented a significant threat to control, were as follows:

Establishment	*Date*	*Incident*	*Outcome*
1. Threats to security entailing a full search			
(a) Closed Prisons			
Birmingham	25 February 1991	Firearms alert	Nothing found
Bristol	11 December 1990	Bomb threat and firearm alert	Nothing found
Bristol	18 January 1991	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Brixton	7 August 1990	Loss of security key	Key not found—locks changed
Canterbury	1 December 1990	Firearm alert	Nothing found
Cardiff	18 November 1990	Firearm alert	Nothing found

Establishment	*Date*	*Incident*	*Outcome*
Channings Wood	31 October 1990	Missing inmate	Inmate found after 2½ hours
Chelmsford	24 July 1990	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Chelmsford	6 November 1990	Loss of security key	Key not found—locks changed
Chelmsford	18 February 1991	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Deerbolt	16 August 1990	Two missing prisoners	Prisoners found in roof space
Eastwood Park	11 January 1991	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Erlestoke	13 March 1991	Loss of security key	Key found
Full Sutton	6 December 1990	Loss of officer's radio	Radio not found
Gartree	31 December 1990	Firearm alert and concerted indiscipline	No firearm found; illicit alcohol discovered.
Hindley	31 May 1990	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Leicester	9 October 1990	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Leicester	6 November 1990	Photographic film of a security area found	Full search conducted for camera—nothing found
Lewes	22 November 1990	Firearm alert	Canister of an incapacitating agent found.
Lewes	2 December 1990	Replica firearm found	Blank ammunition found
Lewes	25 March 1991	Two live rounds of ammunition found	Blank ammunition found
Lindholme	13 September 1990	Loss of 3 garden knives	All knives found
Liverpool	11 September 1990	Security key missing	Key not found
Long Lartin	24 May 1990	Firearm alert	Nothing found
Low Newton	5 December 1990	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Pentonville	2 October 1990	Bomb threat	Nothing found
Preston	14 November 1990	Loss of kitchen knife	Knife eventually found in drain on 28 November 1990
Ranby	21 June 1990	Two prisoners missing	Recaptured in prison kitchen
Shepton Mallet	31 July 1990	Loss of security key	Key found
Wormwood Scrubs	3 May 1991	Firearm alert	Nothing found
(b) Open Prisons			
Finnamore Wood	11 July 1990	Security key missing	Prisoner who stole key discovered
Hewell Grange	3 April 1991	Loss of officer's radio	Radio found on 9 April 1991
New Hall	14 January 1991	Bomb threat	Nothing found
New Hall	4 February 1991	Bomb threat	Nothing found
2. Significant threats to control (All closed prisons)			
Acklington	12 February 1991	Refusal to return to cells	Damage to prison property—resolved after one hour without use of force
Cardiff	1 November 1990	Rooftop demonstration by 2 inmates	Damage to roof. Inmates surrendered after 5 hours
Cookham Wood	6 December 1990	Refusal to return to cells	Resolved by negotiation
Full Sutton	3 June 1990	36 prisoners barricaded in dining hall	Damage to prison property. Surrendered after 7½ hours
Full Sutton	5 January 1991	85 prisoners refused to return to cells	Resolved after 3 hours. No force used
Full Sutton	6 January 1991	75 prisoners refused to return to cells	Resolved after 2½ hours. No force used
Hull	30 September 1990	Rooftop demonstration by 2 inmates	Surrendered after 1¼ hours and 5 hours respectively
Kirklevington	12 November 1990	Barricade and attempted escape	Damage to prison property. Resolved by control and restraint teams.
Leeds	26 July 1990	92 prisoners refused to leave exercise yard.	Ended peacefully after one hour.
Norwich	2 December 1990	Barricade and escape attempt by 9 prisoners.	Control and restraint team intervened after 6½ hours of negotiation. Attempt thwarted.

Establishment	Date	Incident	Outcome
Parkhurst	28 July 1990	Rooftop demonstration by 2 inmates	Control and restraint team intervened after 11½ hours of negotiation.
Pentonville	24 March 1991	12 prisoners refused to leave exercise yard.	Ended after 1½ hours.
Preston	15 July 1990	Rooftop demonstration by 51 inmates.	Surrendered after 4 hours.
Rochester	31 December 1990	20 prisoners refused to leave TV room.	Resolved by negotiation after 1½ hours.
Rochester	17 February 1991	30 prisoners damaged dormitories.	Resolved by negotiation after 1½ hours.
Shepton Mallet	15 November 1990	Suspected concerted indiscipline.	No incident occurred; suspected ringleaders transferred.
Stoke Heath	7 April 1991	Prisoners refused to leave dining hall.	Resolved by negotiation after half an hour.
Winchester	13 May 1990	Rooftop demonstration by 7 inmates.	Considerable damage to roof; resolved by negotiation after 10 hours.
Winchester	17 February 1991	34 prisoners refused to leave exercise yard.	Resolved by negotiation after one hour.

Transferred Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in gaols in England and Wales were transferred in the interests of good order and discipline under the provisions of C.I. 10/74 and its successor C.I. 37/90 in each of the last five years; and how many of those prisoners were placed in segregation or solitary confinement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases since 1986 his Department has received written or oral representations from Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi directly or indirectly through the West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd. in respect of applications for political asylum or applications concerning immigration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics of individual cases and representations by individual agents are not recorded. The information could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reports he has received from the Metropolitan police about Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi and West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd.; when reports were received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 26 November 1990 the police investigating the activities of Mr. Bedi and West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd. have been in close and regular contact with the Home Office. Most of these exchanges have involved requests by the police for information, evidence and witness statements.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has information about any staff, or former staff, of the immigration and nationality department, who have been retained, directly or indirectly, by West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am not aware of any present or former member of the department's staff being so retained. If the hon. Member has information indicating that a member of the Home Office staff has been retained by this organisation, I should be grateful if he would bring it to my attention.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many official contacts there have been between his Department and Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi, (i) individually, (ii) representing the West Middlesex Immigration Service Ltd. or (iii) representing any other organisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics of contact with individuals, individual agents, organisations or representatives are not recorded. The information could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines have been issued to officials in the immigration and nationality department about Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi and West Middlesex Immigration Services Ltd.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No general guidelines have been issued. But certain officials have been instructed to give the fullest co-operation to the Metropolitan and City police company fraud department in the conduct of their investigation into the activities of Mr. Bedi and this company.

Juvenile Liaison Panels

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many police forces in England and Wales juvenile liaison panels are operating.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Juvenile liaison panels are operating successfully in a number of police forces, but comprehensive information as to their precise distribution is not available centrally.

Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for the release of Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal from Bedford prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am satisfied that a decision to release Mr. Chahal cannot be justified at the present time.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Representations on Mr. Chahal's behalf have been received from several hon. Members, his legal representatives, concerned members of the Sikh community, Amnesty International and other concerned individuals. The representations have concerned the reasons for the decision to make a deportation order on grounds of national security; the decision to detain Mr. Chahal; and his claim to political asylum. Mr. Chahal has indicated that he wishes to make representations to the three advisers, and I shall ensure that all representations made to the Home Office are brought to their attention. My right hon. Friend shall, of course, review the case fully in the light of the advisers' recommendations, the available evidence and any representations made on Mr. Chahal's behalf.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal to be able to appeal, with legal representation, against refusal to grant him asylum in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Chahal has no statutory entitlement to appeal to the independent appellate authorities against the decision to refuse him political asylum. He does, however, have an entitlement to appeal against any directions set for his removal from the United Kingdom. In addition, he has asked to make representations to the three advisers about my right hon. Friend's decision to deport him for reasons of national security. Any request for him to be legally represented before the three advisers is a matter for their consideration.

Criminal Records

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to his policy for the disclosure of criminal background of those with access to children, what progress he has made in developing separate arrangements for those working with voluntary organisations, as envisaged in paragraph 1 of Home Office circular 102/88.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Three pilot schemes have been operational since early 1990 and are now being evaluated. They have enabled criminal records to be disclosed to certain voluntary organisations under the terms of Home Office circular 58/1989. Proposals for the future will be drawn up in the light of the evaluation report and the recommendations of the Home Office scrutiny of criminal records which reported at the end of April.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraqi Nuclear Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific categories of armament are required to be included in the Iraqi Government's inventory of nuclear materials in Iraq under United Nations Security Council resolution 687.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN Security Council resolution 687 required Iraq to submit to the Secretary General and the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency a declaration of the locations, amounts and types of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons usable material, subsystems, components and any related research, development, support or manufacturing facilities.

Nuclear Suppliers Group

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 26 April, column *600*, whether any meetings of the nuclear suppliers group were sought between 1978 and 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A number of informal discussions took place between 1978 and 1991 about the possibility of further meetings of states adhering to the nuclear suppliers group guidelines.

Correspondence Unit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), *Official Report*, 30 April, column *140*, about the volume of correspondence received by the Foreign Office Members of Parliament correspondence unit, if he will make it his policy to institute arrangements to enable him to answer substantively such questions in future.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Detailed statistics about the volume of correspondence received are not readily available, and at present could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, we are considering the results of a scrutiny of ministerial correspondence by the Cabinet Office.

Mixed Oxide Nuclear Fuel (Japan)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been offered by the British embassy in Japan to British Nuclear Fuels plc in obtaining contracts from Japanese Electrical Utilities for mixed oxide nuclear fuel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British Nuclear Fuels plc has no mixed oxide nuclear fuel contracts with Japanese customers at present. The British embassy provides British companies, including BNFL, with commercial assistance as well as advice on the political background in Japan. There is a counsellor (atomic energy) on the staff of the embassy.

Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

ENERGY

Electrostatic Dust Precipitators

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what directions he has given to PowerGen and National Power regarding the level of expenditure by each company on electrostatic dust precipitators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Regulatory control of emissions from the electricity supply industry is the responsibility of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Expenditure on maintenance of electrostatic precipitators is part of normal pollution control necessary to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements for the control of emissions. It is, therefore, a matter for the companies.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the cost per kilowatt hour of the most widely used *(a)* wet-dry, *(b)* wet and *(c)* dry flue gas desulphurisation processes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The cost per kilowatt hour of sulphur dioxide abatement varies considerably depending not only on the choice of process but on a number of other factors including the level of abatement required, fuel quality, plant size, load factor, accounting practices and whether the installation is new or retrofit as well as site-specific factors. These factors will also affect the choice of emission control equipment. A comprehensive review of emission abatement technologies, "Manual of Acidic Abatement Technologies", undertaken by the Fellowship of Engineering for the Department of Environment, contains sample cost estimates for a number of FGD processes and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the level of expenditure in each EC country on fitting flue gas desulphurisation over the past five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is not available. For the United Kingdom, expenditure on the installation of FGD equipment at Drax power station to end 1990 was £165 million.

Electricity Sources

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a table showing the percentage of electricity derived from *(a)* coal, *(b)* coal plant using flue gas desulphurisation, *(c)* oil, *(d)* gas, *(e)* hydro and *(f)* other renewable sources in each European Community member state.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The breakdown of electricity production which can be provided is given in the table:

Percentage of electricity production in 1989

	Coal[2]	*Conventional thermal*[1] *Petroleum products*	*Gas*	*Other*[3]	*Nuclear*	*Hydro-electric*	*Geothermal*
Belgium	22	3	12	1	61	2	—
Denmark	92	5	1	—	—	2	—
West Germany	48	2	10	1	34	5	—
Greece	72	21	—	—	—	7	—
Spain	40	6	1	—	39	14	—
France	8	3	2	—	75	13	—
Ireland	[4]57	5	31	—	—	8	—
Italy	13	48	18	—	—	19	1
Luxembourg	—	2	35	3	—	61	—
Netherlands	30	4	58	1	5	—	—
Portugal	28	45	—	3	—	24	—
United Kingdom	65	10	2	—	22	2	—

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

[1] Data are not available separately for plant using flue gas desulphurisation.
[2] Including lignite.
[3] Steam purchased, wood, peat, industrial residues etc.
[4] Including peat.

Source: Eurostat.

North Sea Investment

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of total United Kingdom industrial investment is accounted for by capital investment in the North sea.

Mr. Moynihan: Capital investment in the North sea accounted for 16 per cent. of total United Kingdom industrial investment in 1990.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information his Department holds on interruptions of supply to domestic consumers of each electricity company in England and Wales from each year since 1985-86 up to and including 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: Under regulation 35 of the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988, every supplier is required to give notice to my Department of supply failures where two days' prior notice to consumers has not been given.

The figures for supply interruptions to all consumers, on a company basis, during the period 1987-88 to 1990-91 are as follows:

Electricity company	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
London	7	5	13	16
Seeboard	2	15	19	7
Southern	5	7	20	9
South West	7	12	12	7
Eastern	14	16	25	14
East Midlands	3	9	9	9
Midlands	5	8	19	11
South Wales	2	4	6	2
Manweb	2	0	0	2
Yorkshire	5	4	2	8
Northern	6	0	13	17
Norweb	4	7	7	4
TOTAL	62	87	145	106

The figures do not distinguish between domestic consumers and others. Earlier figures are not readily available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Commercial Agreements (Iraq)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all current commercial agreements with Iraq that his Department has sanctioned.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Weights and Measures Agency

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has set performance targets for the National Weights and Measures Laboratory executive agency for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. I have set the agency the following targets:

Target	1991-92
Total number of new patterns examined	80
Total number of pattern variants examined	360
Total number of calibration certificates issued	590
Percentage of examinations completed in 18 weeks from registration	75 per cent.
Percentage of certificates published in 12 weeks	80 per cent.
Target annual fee increase	1 per cent. less than inflation
Target increase in cost of calibration of particular weight set	1 per cent. less than inflation

In working towards achieving these targets the National Weights and Measures Laboratory is again planning to offer a higher quality of service to customers at a lower real unit cost.

Uncertificated Shares

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish the draft regulations to permit the introduction of uncertificated shares.

Mr. Redwood: In July 1990 I published a consultative paper entitled "Electronic Recording and Transfer of Shares". Many comments were received, and in the light of them and of extensive discussion with the stock exchange to establish how it wishes the system to work in legal terms, my Department has now prepared draft regulations. These regulations, to be made under section 207 of the Companies Act 1989, will provide the essential legal and regulatory framework for TAURUS.

I have today published the draft regulations in the form of a consultative document entitled "The Uncertificated Securities Regulations". Comments are invited by 16 August. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library of the House.

Cross-media Promotion

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now respond to the report on standards of cross-media promotion, submitted to him by Mr. John Sadler.

Mr. Lilley : I announced on 13 March that I welcomed the publication of the Sadler report, and that I would be willing, during a period of six weeks, to hear the views of interested parties before making any final decisions. I am grateful to those who responded, both to me and to the Home Secretary, with whom I have discussed the way ahead.

The newspaper industry

The report recommended that the newspaper industry should be invited to establish a code of practice on cross-media promotion and suggested the points that such a code should cover. Virtually all those who responded welcomed this recommendation in principle. There have been encouraging indications from the industry itself that it is willing to draw up a code.

The recommendation concerning premium rate telephone services attracted less comment in itself. Those who did mention it specifically were in favour.

I have therefore decided to pursue the Sadler recommendation:

"The newspaper industry should be invited to establish a code of practice on cross media promotion".

I also accept the related recommendation:

"The promotion of premium rate telephone services should be governed by the provisions of the general code of practice on cross media promotion which . . . the newspaper industry should be invited to establish".

I have written today to the chairman of the Newspaper Publishers Association and the director of the Newspaper Society, which between them cover national and regional newspapers, welcoming the recommendations that newspapers both individually and nationally should draw up codes of practice on cross-media promotion, and inviting them to take these recommendations forward on behalf of the industry.

The BBC's promotion of its magazines

The Sadler report recommended that the Director General of Fair Trading should be asked to consider referring to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the BBC's practice in respect of the use of its air time to promote its magazines, because in his view this might be distorting competition. The overwhelming majority of those who responded to my invitation to comment strongly supported this recommendation. The Home Secretary and I have also seen the BBC.

After reflecting carefully on all the arguments regarding the BBC's promotional activities, the Home Secretary and I have decided to accept the recommendation.

The issues are complex and a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will allow all sides of the argument to be heard by an independent body which has considerable experience in assessing the public interest where competition is in question. If I were to reject the Sadler recommendation I would be failing to acknowledge that such questions deserved careful consideration.

I have written to the Director General of Fair Trading today to tell him of my and the Home Secretary's views.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Services ("Customers")

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what instructions or requests have been made by him or any Government Department to any office, agency, or publicly owned service or authority to use the word customers in respect of users of public services; and if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of this word in respect of British Railways, London Transport, the Benefits Agency, and schools.

The Prime Minister: No such instructions have been issued.

"Next Steps" Agencies

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the study by Sir Angus Fraser of the relationship between Government Departments and the "next steps" agencies.

The Prime Minister: Since my predecessor's announcement of the "next steps" initiative on 18 February 1988, 50 agencies have been set up, and nearly half of all civil servants will soon be operating under "next steps" principles. This is already leading to the real improvements in the quality of service to the public and better value for money which the changes are designed to secure.

In the light of these developments Sir Angus Fraser was asked to examine the relationship between Departments and agencies and how Departments should be adapting their structure, size and methods of working. In his report to me, Sir Angus records the general agreement that "next steps" is going well. There is genuine enthusiasm and energy throughout the civil service for the changes that are taking place, with fresh ideas and increased commitment to improving value for money and quality of service, for the benefit both of the customer and the taxpayer. Running alongside this is a strong conviction that there is scope for more progress.

The report contains a number of ideas for developing the roles of both Departments and agencies in support of Ministers. The objective is that both sides of the relationship between Ministers and chief executives—which lies at the heart of "next steps"—should be strengthened.

For their part, Departments must provide well-informed and authoritative support to Ministers in order that Ministers can give agencies clear strategic direction firmly related to the Government's policy objectives; determine the financial resources to be made available: select and set suitably robust and meaningful targets covering quality of service, financial performance and efficiency; and call chief executives to account for the performance. This means strategic advice and direction, geared to the relationship between each Minister and agency, not day-to-day involvement. As a result, the number of people at the centres of Departments can be reduced.

On the other side, chief executives will need increased personal responsibility and authority for running their organisations in order to achieve the progressive improvements in performance, quality of service and value for money that are required. The Government believe that agencies' delegations and flexibilities can be enlarged as their track record of performance is established, provided that essential controls on public expenditure are not jeopardised.

It is on the basis of these principles that I have asked the head of the home civil service to set in train arrangements to ensure that the ideas in this report are taken forward in each Department and agency in ways which fit each particular activity. The next steps project manager has been instructed to work with the Treasury and Departments to achieve this, reporting to me through the head of the home civil service. I look forward to seeing further improvements in the management of the civil service resulting from this process.

I am grateful to Sir Angus Fraser and his team for their report. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House and is being published by HMSO today.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

HEALTH

Disabled People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total public expenditure so far on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available. Expenditure on the assessment, consultation and representation aspects of the Act is included in fieldwork and administration costs, while service expenditure attributable to the Act cannot be separated from service expenditure that might otherwise have occurred.

Goodmayes Hospital, Redbridge

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will order an inquiry into staffing levels and the level of patient care at Goodmayes hospital, Redbridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many break-ins there have been in the case of Goodmayes hospital, Redbridge, over the last 12

months; what security arrangements exist in the hospital to deter breaches of the law; and what lighting arrangements exist in the hospital grounds and property for reasons of security and personal protection.

Mr. Dorrell: Security arrangements at health service premises are the responsibility of local managers. They are best placed to determine the appropriate security arrangements for the protection of both patients and staff in the light of their knowledge of their premises and the degree of access necessary for patients and their visitors.

The hon. Member may wish to write to Miss Delva Patman, chairman of Redbridge district health authority, for details.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use has been made of bank nurses by Goodmayes hospital for night time cover in the last 12 months.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Miss Delva Patman, chairman of Redbridge health authority, for details.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the funding of Goodmayes hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: None. Funding of all national health service provider units now depends on their success at securing contracts from purchasing authorities.

Clinical Waste Disposal

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue guidelines to health authorities and NHS trusts in order for them to comply with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with regard to the disposal of clinical waste, amputated limbs, soiled bandages, drugs and syringes;

(2) if there has been a Government survey of the hospitals that do not now comply with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as it applies to the disposal of clinical waste;

(3) if he will list the hospitals which are currently negotiating for temporary exemption from the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with regard to the disposal of clinical waste;

(4) if there will be negotiations with individual hospitals concerning temporary exemption from the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with regard to the disposal of clinical waste.

Mr. Dorrell: A "Strategic Guide for Waste Management", which deals with the effects of the removal of Crown immunity from the national health service and the implementation of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library, was issued to health authorities and NHS trusts in March 1991.

From 1 April 1991 health authorities with clinical waste incinerators have to obtain authorisation for their operation from the appropriate local authority. If upgrading of the incinerator is required in order to meet the requirements of the environmental protection legislation a programme for that upgrading has to be agreed with the local authority within six months of the date of issue of the first authorisation.

I have asked the NHS management executive to monitor the progress being made to meet the requirements of the environmental protection legislation and establish the number of units which are unable, by 1 April 1992, to comply with the full requirements.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is currently carrying out into benzodiazepines.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department is not currently involved in any such research.

Osteoporosis

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for women the numbers treated by the national health service suffering from osteoporosis for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and at what cost to the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally.

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish figures for 1989-90 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in England whose deliveries were *(a)* spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous, *(b)* instrumental, including forceps, vacuum and breech extractions, *(c)* caesarean section and *(d)* other and unspecified means;

(2) if he will publish figures for 1989-90 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in England *(a)* whose labours were induced, *(b)* whose labours were of spontaneous onset and *(c)* who had elective caesarean section.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Provisional estimates of the percentages requested for England are given in the following tables.

Method of delivery	*Per cent.*
Spontaneous	78
Instrumental	10
Caesarean section	12
Other and unspecified	[1]—

[1] Less than 0·5 per cent.

Method of onset of labour	*Per cent.*
Induced	18
Spontaneous onset	74
Elective caesarean	5
Not known	3

Source: SMI2: Maternity hospital episode statistics.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Fixed Investment

14. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest International Monetary Fund forecast for the growth in United Kingdom fixed investment in 1991.

Mr. Mellor: The International Monetary Fund will publish a new forecast of United Kingdom fixed investment in the "World Economic Outlook", which is expected to be published at the end of May.

Working Mothers

16. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the tax arrangements for working mothers with small children.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I can assure my hon. Friend that we keep the tax arrangements for working mothers continually under review. But, as he will recall, we decided that a priority this year was to give further help to all mothers with children, through increases in child benefit.

Charities

17. **Mr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has had on the implications of his Budget for charitable organisations.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have received a number of representations from charities following the Budget and I can assure my hon. Friend that their views will be carefully considered.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

18. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated public sector borrowing requirement for this financial year; and what are the comparable figures for the United States of America and the average of EC countries.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn).

Manufacturing Trade

19. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the latest trend in the balance of trade for manufactured goods.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr Irvine).

Inflation

20. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the inflation rate.

Mr. Norman Lamont: All-items RPI inflation was 8·2 per cent. in March. It is expected to fall sharply over the coming months to 4 per cent. in the fourth quarter of 1991.

Interest Rates

21. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to see a further reduction in interest rates.

Mr. Mellor: Interest rates will continue to be set at levels which are fully consistent with our commitment to keep sterling within its ERM bands and to bear down on inflation.

25. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from businesses on the effects of high interest rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend has received a number of such representations.

27. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Bank base rates are 12 per cent.

Insolvencies

22. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of insolvencies and liquidations in 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The total number of business failures, including liquidations, winding-up orders and self-employed bankruptcy orders, was about 25,000 in England and Wales in 1990, representing around 1·6 per cent. of the companies registered for VAT at the end of the year.

Corporation Tax

23. **Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the corporation tax rates and thresholds for small businesses; and what the equivalent figures were for 1979.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the corporation tax rates and thresholds for small businesses; and what were the equivalent figures for 1979.

Mr. Maude: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

Investment

24. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how has the level of total investment within the United Kingdom economy changed since 1980.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Total investment in the United Kingdom at constant prices grew by over 47 per cent. between 1980 and 1990.

Productivity

26. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when in the last 30 years was whole economy productivity at a lower level than it is now.

Mr. Mellor: In every year but 1988 whole economy productivity was lower than in 1990.

Energy Efficiency

28. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations of the Energy Committee's third report of this Session on energy efficiency in respect of taxation policies.

Mr. Maude: The Government will be giving their response to the Select Committee's report in the normal way.

Aggregate Dredging, Solent

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much aggregate was dredged in the Solent in 1990; and what were the comparable figures for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is as follows:

Year	*Quantity Dredged*
1980	891,747
1981	581,164
1982	542,756
1983	502,854
1984	540,123
1985	410,416
1986	438,557
1987	411,233
1988	336,011
1989	268,345
1990	324,345

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Crown estate earned from aggregate dredging in the Solent in 1990.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Crown estate earned £117,358 from marine aggregate dredging licences for the Solent in 1990.

Direct Taxation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans further to reduce direct taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: It remains our objective to reduce the basic rate of income tax to 20p in the pound.

Value Added Tax

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what powers he possesses to veto proposals from the Customs and Excise authorities should they wish to change a valued added tax band in which any item is placed, and where the consent of the European Commission is not required.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Any proposal to alter the provisions of the VAT Act would be a matter for Parliament. Care and management of the tax is, however, specifically laid by statute to the commissioners of Customs and Excise and this includes interpretation of the existing provisions of the Act. The proper convention is that Ministers do not intervene in such matters. Disputes about interpretation of the provisions of the Act are subject to reviews by independent VAT tribunals.

Profit-sharing Share Schemes

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies currently operate a profit-sharing share scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Of 1,943 all-employee share schemes approved by the Inland Revenue up to 30 April 1991, 966 were profit-sharing schemes. Any such scheme may relate to one or more companies, and I regret that information about the total number of companies covered is not readily available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

In the year to 31 March 1990, shares worth £380 million were appropriated under approved profit sharing schemes to 850,000 employees.

Rating Valuation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the results of the work undertaken by the Valuation Office due for completion on 10 May under rating circular No. 58; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary on 2 May, *Official Report*, column *299*.

Platform Yards

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost to Her Majesty's Exchequer for the building of *(a)* the platform yard at Hunterston, Ayrshire, and *(b)* other platform yards in Scotland in the periods 1975 to 1978 and 1978 to date.

Mr. Moynihan: I have been asked to reply.

Under the Offshore Petroleum Development (Scotland) Act 1975 expenditure was incurred on Portavadie and Hunterston. The trading account for the year ended 31 March 1986 indicated expenditure of £29·2 million, of which £22·8 million was incurred between 1975 and 1978. A breakdown between the two yards is not readily available.

Any financial support for other platform yards in Scotland is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quotas

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the national milk quotas for all EC countries; and what information he has on the degree to which member states have succeeded in enforcing them.

Mr. Curry: Details of the milk quotas available to each member state of the EC are set out in the table. The Commission's proposal for quota reductions of about 2 per cent. have not been taken into account. It is for the EC Commission to ensure that the quota regulations are enforced by member states and expenditure from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund may be disallowed if infringements are discovered. In 1988, the latest year for which accounts have been cleared, disallowances were made in respect of expenditure by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands; the Commission has reserved its position in relation to Ireland, where court action is outstanding.

All figures in tonnes

Member states	*(A) Wholesale quota before suspension 1991-92*	*(B) Quota suspended by regulation 775/87*	*(C) Community reserve quota*			*(A)−(B)+(C) Total available wholesale quota*	*Direct sales quota*
			(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*		
Belgium	3,089,751	144,495	—	5,511	32,110	2,982,877	380,809
Denmark	4,686,720	219,690	—	8,064	48,820	4,523,914	970
Germany total (of	29,118,960	1,360,215	—	135,000	234,230	28,127,975	153,100
which former GDR)	(6,599,880)	(306,180)	—	—	—	—	(60,000)
Greece	555,520	24,165	—	—	5,370	536,725	4,620
Spain	4,664,000	209,250	50,000	—	46,500	4,551,250	527,500
Portugal	1,779,000	—	—	—	—	1,779,000	121,000
France	24,708,640	1,153,530	—	53,672	256,340	23,865,122	747,780
Ireland	5,068,800	237,600	303,000	98,881	52,800	5,285,881	15,520
Italy	8,796,080	395,910	—	—	87,980	8,488,150	732,520
Luxembourg	254,400	11,925	25,000	674	2,650	270,799	970
Netherlands	11,499,840	539,055	—	40,141	119,790	11,120,716	92,150
United Kingdom	14,716,391	689,831	65,000	160,290	153,296	14,405,146	383,563
European Community 12	108,938,102	4,985,666	443,000	502,233	1,039,886	105,937,555	3,160,502

Footnotes:

(a) Determined in accordance with Article 5c(4) of Council Regulation 804/68.
(b) "SLOM" quota issued under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 764/89.
(c) Additional quota allocated for 1989/90 and subsequent years under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3880/89.

Fishing Fleet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the extent of the required reduction of the United Kingdom's fishing fleet in percentage terms in relation to gross registered tonnes and engine power, under the European Community's multi-annual guidance programme in 1991 and 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom's current multi-annual guidance programme is being amended to reflect the number of registered, as opposed to active, fishing vessels, and the final 1991 target is not available. The 1992-96 MAGP has not yet been promulgated.

Dumping at Sea

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether permission has been granted to a private firm to dump 2,000 cu. m. of spoil off Bolt head; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: An application for a licence to dump dredged material off Bolt head has been received and is under consideration.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to protect the coastal waters off South Devon from spoil dumping at sea.

Mr. Curry: Under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 no disposal of dredged material is permitted without a licence. In determining whether to issue a licence for any site in England and Wales, the Ministry must have regard to the need to protect the marine environment, the living resources which it supports and human health, to the need to prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea and to the practical availability of any alternative methods of dealing with the material.

Regulations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether it is normal practice for his Ministry to circulate relevant regulations to local authorities.

Mr. Gummer: Legislation relevant to local authorities is publicised in a number of ways, including direct contact with local authority associations and their co-ordinating bodies. Printed copies are available from HMSO, but are not normally circulated by my Department.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Border Roads

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many border roads have been closed by order of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during the past five years; and if he will state the roads which have been closed.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not readily available in the format requested and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. There are, however, 291 recognised border crossing points, 98 of which are subject to closure orders. Seventy-five of these crossings are currently closed.

Conservation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the enhancement strategies in respect of the conservation areas in Killough, Strangford, Ardglass, Saintfield, Killyleagh and Rostrevor will be published; and what action will be taken in respect of this matter.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

(a) Killough : A draft enhancement strategy was forwarded by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland to the village committee for comment in September 1990 and the Department is awaiting a reply.

(b) Strangford : The Department intends to finalise the draft enhancement strategy for June 1991 and the document will then be presented to the village committee for their comments.

(c) Killyleagh : Has not yet been designated as a conservation area but is included in the designation programme for 1991-92 and an architectural consultant has been appointed to prepare design guidance for the conservation area.

The Department of Environment's intention, subject to availability of resources, is to complete designation and enhancement strategies for Ardglass, Saintfield and the extension to the Rostrevor conservation area boundary within the next five years.

Employment Statistics

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the numbers employed in each district council area on a monthly basis from 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1991 according to the information collected by the Government Statistical Service.

Mr. Needham: Comprehensive information on the number of employees in employment by district council area is available only from the census of employment, currently conducted every two years. Information from the census for September 1987 and 1989 is:

District Council	*September 1987*	*September 1989*
Derry	28,200	30,000
Limavady	5,900	6,500
Coleraine	15,800	16,900
Ballymoney	5,300	5,300
Moyle	2,100	2,400
Larne	7,100	7,400
Ballymena	19,200	20,100
Magherafelt	8,600	9,700
Cookstown	5,600	5,900
Strabane	6,900	7,400
Omagh	12,100	12,500
Fermanagh	12,400	14,300
Dungannon	11,000	12,400
Craigavon	27,100	28,000
Armagh	12,900	12,600
Newry and Mourne	18,400	19,500
Banbridge	7,100	7,100
Down	13,000	13,500
Lisburn	25,400	26,700
Antrim	11,800	12,000
Newtownabbey	20,900	23,200
Carrickfergus	5,700	5,800
North Down	14,200	15,200
Ards	14,300	16,200
Castlereagh	17,800	18,800
Belfast	159,900	159,700
Northern Ireland	488,700	509,100

(1) Figures relate to employees in employment and exclude Agriculture.
(2) Employment figures are rounded to the nearest 100 and may not add due to rounding.
(3) *Source:* NI Census of Employment.
(4) 1989 figures are provisional and may be subject to revision.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration of public policy underlay his decision not to offer the people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere the opportunity to apply for share ownership in the privatised electricity generating industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The Government, having considered with their advisers all possible methods of sale, decided that sale of the power stations by private treaty was more appropriate than a public flotation.

The main reason for this is the size of the individual generation businesses which makes them unsuitable for sale by flotation.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will suspend the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity until the European Community directive to reduce emissions from power stations to meet EC regulations is met.

Mr. Needham: No. Legislation which will give effect to the large combustion plant directive in Northern Ireland is already in preparation and will be operative before the completion of arrangements for the privatisation of NIE. Accordingly, I see no reason why progress on the privatisation should be delayed on that account.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy, in the light of the impending privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity, to answer questions on the day-to-day running of that company during the two years immediately prior to flotation and sale.

Mr. Needham: The existing arrangements for answering hon. Members' questions on aspects of Northern Ireland Electricity's operations will remain unchanged while that organisation is in the public sector.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when refurbishment of Northern Ireland Electricity headquarters in Belfast is expected to be completed.

Mr. Needham: NIE advises that the work is expected to be completed by the end of May 1991.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the projected budget for advertising and marketing the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: The details of the marketing and advertising campaign have not yet been drawn up and therefore there is no budget.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations were received from the trade unions in Northern Ireland Electricity regarding the proposals to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: Since the publication of the Government's proposals, representations have been received from the trade unions in which they have sought assurances about the future rights of members of the NIE pension scheme and asked that the unions be consulted on this and other matters affecting their members' interests. Representations have also been received to the effect that work on the privatisation should be suspended pending the outcome of the current political talks.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether ministerial approval was sought by Northern Ireland Electricity for expenditure on refurbishment of its headquarters.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland Electricity is required to seek approval for major capital items and approval for expenditure on the refurbishment of NIE headquarters was sought and given.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether copies of all consultants' reports commissioned by Northern Ireland Electricity have been

made available to the Department of Economic Development (NI); and if he will place in the Library a copy of each report commissioned related to NIE in the last two years.

Mr. Needham: NIE has made available to the Department of Economic Development copies of those reports commissioned by NIE which are considered to be significant. These are commercially confidential and a decision to publish would lie with NIE.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the daily average percentage of Northern Ireland's electricity generated at Ballylumford power station, Kilroot power station, Belfast West power station and Coolkeeragh power station.

Mr. Needham: The daily average percentage of electricity generated by each of Northern Ireland Electricity's power stations fluctuates widely depending on the price of fuel at the time and maintenance and other routine requirements. During the year ended 31 March 1991, the percentage of electricity generated by Northern Ireland Electricity's four power stations was as follows:

	Number
Ballylumford	51
Kilroot	32
Belfast West	10
Coolkeeragh	7

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what media and other channels of communication will be used in the marketing of the four Northern Ireland power stations.

Mr. Needham: The details of the marketing arrangements for the four power stations have not yet been finalised and this has not yet been decided.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any refurbishment or redecoration of offices at *(a)* Kilroot power station, *(b)* Belfast West power station, *(c)* Coolkeeragh power station and *(d)* Ballylumford power station is planned before privatisation of electricity generation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: NIE advises that no further office refurbishment at Kilroot and Coolkeeragh power stations is planned beyond the routine work recently completed. The present work at Belfast West will complete a general update of the station and no further work is planned before privatisation. No refurbishment of the offices at Ballylumford is planned before privatisation.

Schools and Colleges (Rates)

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total rates bill for grant-aided secondary schools and further education colleges in each of the five education and library boards in the 1991-92 financial year.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Estimated expenditure on rates by education and library boards-1991-92

	Belfast	*North Eastern*	*South Eastern*	*Southern*	*Western*
	£000s	*£000s*	*£000s*	*£000s*	*£000s*
Secondary Schools	2,610	3,192	2,161	2,600	2,025
Further Education	626	683	456	593	400

SCOTLAND

Dampness

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessments he has made of the efficiency of erecting false walls as a remedy for dampness in local authority housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for local authorities themselves to draw up programmes for tackling dampness and condensation in their housing stock and to take account of the relevance and effectiveness of particular repair methods adopted. The Scottish Office has in recent years undertaken or commissioned research, and published the findings, relating to condensation in public authority housing and the assessment of available thermal upgrading or other remedial measures. In addition, a considerable amount of guidance on these issues has been published by other bodies including the Building Research Establishment.

Foxes

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of grant paid to fox destruction clubs in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 1 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *723*.

Manufacturing Job Losses

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total net job loss in manufacturing in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* the Paisley travel-to-work area since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Between 1979 and 1989, the net job losses in manufacturing in Scotland, Strathclyde region and Paisley totalled 209,500, 138,800 and 14,600 respectively. As Paisley is part of the Glasgow travel-to-work-area, the figures given relate to plants with a Paisley postcode.

The table shows components of change in manufacturing employment between 1979 and 1989 in Scotland, Strathclyde region and Paisley. It takes account of job gains due to new openings and the expansion of existing plants; and job losses due to closures and contractions. These figures should be regarded as provisional, as they may change when more data become available.

Components of change in manufacturing employment between 1979 and 1989

thousands

	Stock in 1979	Gains		Losses		Stock in 1989	Net change	Percentage Net change
		Opening	Expansion	Closure	Contraction			
Scotland	563·2	59·7	42·7	188·0	123·9	353·7	−209·5	−37
Strathclyde	307·4	31·4	17·8	111·8	76·2	168·6	−138·8	−45
Paisley	19·1	0·3	0·4	11·9	3·4	4·5	−14·6	−76

Source: The Scottish Office Industry Department Regional Data System.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the percentages of disabled staff employed in the Scottish Office in each year since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

Year	Per cent.
1981	1·63
1982	1·65
1983	1·32
1984	1·20
1985	1·50
1986	1·70
1987	1·70
1988	1·40
1989	1·40
1990	1·20
1991	1·40

My Department, in common with other Government Departments, accepts the same responsibilities for employment of the disabled as other employers of 20 or more staff. We work to a target of 3 per cent. of total staff for the total of registered disabled people.

Rents

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the average weekly rental charge for houses owned by *(a)* Renfrew district council and *(b)* Scottish Homes or its predecessor in each year since 1975;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the average rise in weekly rental charges for houses owned by *(a)* Renfrew district council and *(b)* Scottish Homes or its predecessor in each year since 1975.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average standard rent per dwelling per week set by Renfrew district council and by the Scottish Special Housing Association and Scottish Homes and the annual increase in average standard rent per dwelling per week set by these authorities for the years requested are shown in the table:

Year	Renfrew District Council		SSHA/Scottish Homes	
	rent	rent increase	rent	rent increase
	£	£	£	£
1975-76	—	—	3·11	0·50
1976-77	—	—	3·70	0·59
1977-78	—	—	4·31	0·61
1978-79	3·93	—	4·84	0·53
1979-80	4·43	0·50	5·43	0·59
1980-81	5·34	0·91	7·21	1·78
1981-82	7·19	1·85	9·15	1·94
1982-83	8·10	0·91	11·26	2·11
1983-84	8·33	0·23	11·96	0·70
1984-85	8·81	0·48	13·06	1·10
1985-86	9·81	0·10	14·23	1·17
1986-87	11·50	1·69	15·79	1·56
1987-88	12·99	1·49	17·28	1·49
1988-89	13·92	0·93	19·02	1·74
1989-90	15·97	1·95	20·65	1·63
1990-91	18·42	2·55	23·35	2·70
1991-92	21·10	2·68	26·51	3·16

Notes: (1) Average rents for Renfrew District Council are based on the estimated position as at 30 September in each year. Comparable data are not available for the years before 1978-79. The data for 1991-92 are provisional.

(2) Average rents for the SSHA are based on the position as at 30 September for the years 1975-76 to 1981-82, as at 30 June for 1982-83, and as at 1 April for subsequent years. Average rents for Scottish Homes are based on the position as at 1 April for both 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Economic Development (Renfrew)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specific plans he has to promote economic development within Renfrew district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government are promoting locally based economic development in Renfrew district through substantial assistance to Scottish Enterprise and Renfrewshire Enterprise Company, and through public support for Paisley and Renfrew Enterprise Trust. The Government will continue to invest in the public sector contribution to infrastructure necessary to support further economic development. The district has also benefited from substantial inward investment projects assisted by the Government through Locate in Scotland. Other general measures to help increase industrial efficiency and competitiveness will bring benefit to Renfrew.

Press Office

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the guidelines used to govern the activities of his press office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My press office operates under the same rules as govern the activities of other civil servants, namely, the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the December 1987 Armstrong note on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers. Information officers are involved, as a proper part of their duties, in the processes of presentation of Government policies and decisions.

Interior Soft Landscaping

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on interior soft landscaping in each unit under Scottish Office control for the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The amount spent on plants as part of internal furnishing in office buildings occupied by the Scottish Office in the last two years was as follows:

	£
1989-90	12,124
1990-91	1,994

Information on earlier years is not readily available.

Textiles

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to promote the manufacture in Paisley of articles in the paisley pattern; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no specific plans to promote the manufacture of articles in the paisley pattern. However, there are various forms of assistance and advice available to manufacturing companies in the Paisley area from the Scottish Office industry department, Scottish Enterprise and Renfrewshire Enterprise.

Pensioners' Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the proportion of pensioners' homes in Scotland lacking basic draughtproofing or insulation; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on which to base such an estimate is not held centrally.

Employment Prospects, Renfrew

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to improve the employment prospects of young people in Renfrew district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 May at column *51*.

Tenements

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reports he has received from the Scottish Law Commission about changes to the laws affecting common repairs to tenemental property.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. The Secretary of State received a copy of the Commission's discussion paper No. 91 "Property Law: Law of the Tenement" published on 10 December 1990 on which the Commission invited comments from a range of interested groups.

House Repairs and Maintenance

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of owner-occupiers, through right to buy, who have been refused a 50 per cent. grant towards repairs and maintenance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grant is available for repairs but not for works of routine maintenance. It is awarded mainly at the discretion of local authorities. I do not have information about the numbers of applicants, in any category, who have been refused grant assistance.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has of what expenditure on repairs and maintenance a right-to-buy owner-occupier could expect to face in the first 10 years after purchase of *(a)* a three-apartment flat in a high-rise building, *(b)* a three-apartment terrace house and *(c)* a four-apartment semi-detached house.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no such estimates. The expenditure required would depend upon the circumstances of the individual property concerned.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is able to estimate the cost of increasing the present 50 per cent. repair and maintenance private sector housing grant to 90 per cent., 95 per cent. and 98 per cent.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Not all grants currently made are at the maximum rate of 50 per cent. and I am accordingly not in a position to make the estimates requested.

A7

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will identify the 10 accident area schemes on the A7; and when he hopes to begin improvement work on each scheme.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the nature and location of any accident improvement schemes authorised by him to be undertaken as part of the route action plan study of the A7 trunk route south of Hawick.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No accident improvement schemes have yet been authorised to be undertaken on the A7 trunk road south of Hawick. A first interim report has been submitted by Borders regional council to the managing group appointed to take forward a route action plan. The report puts forward proposals for accident remedial schemes at 10 locations.

The locations are:

Goldielands
North of Teviothead School
Teviothead Picnic Site
Eweslees
Fiddleton Toll to Mosspeeble
Ewes Church
Wrae to North of Highmill Bridge
Highmill Bridge
Langholm Town Centre
Middleholm to Auchenrivock

Some 27 accidents have occurred at these locations during the three-year study period and the report indicated that the implementation of accident prevention schemes could result in the accident rate at these locations being halved. The measures proposed include laying anti-skid surfacing and surface dressing, and providing additional traffic signs and road markings. My Department is presently examining the proposals in detail and hopes that it may prove possible to agree to implementation of the majority of these quickly.

Scottish Bus Group

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those buy-outs of Scottish Bus Group subsidiaries which fully involved employee participation in the buy-out;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* each subsidiary of the Scottish Bus Group already sold, indicating in each case the price received by the Government for the sale;

(3) if he will list in the *Official Report* the Scottish Bus Group subsidiaries already sold, indicating in each case who the new owners are.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following table lists, for those subsidiaries sold so far, the names of the purchasers, indicating those which were management-employee buy-outs. Sale prices will be published only after privatisation of all SBG subsidiaries has been completed.

Name of SBG subsidiary sold	*Name of purchaser*	
Lowland Scottish Omnibuses Limited	Lycidas (167) Limited	(MEBO)
Scottish Citylink Coaches Limited	Vexamond Limited	(MEBO)
Midland Scottish Omnibuses Limited	GRT Holdings plc	
Eastern Scottish Omnibuses Limited	SMT Omnibuses plc	(MEBO)
Kelvin Central Buses Limited	Choiceframe Limited	(MEBO)
Northern Scottish Omnibuses Limited	Stage-Coach (Holdings) Limited	

In addition, the Yorkshire Traction Company Ltd. has recently been accorded preferred bidder status in the sale of Strathtay Scottish Omnibuses Ltd.

Women Police Officers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by ranks from police constable to chief constable, the number of male and female police officers employed in each police force; if he has any proposals to increase the proportion of woman officers in the more senior positions; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest available information is set out in the table. Promotions up to chief superintendent level are a matter for the chief constable concerned. Appointments at assistant chief constable and above are for the police authority, subject to the approval of my right hon. Friend. The Department intends to issue a circular shortly which will seek to carry forward the development of equal opportunities policies in the police service.

Total police strength by rank and force as at 31 December 1990

	Central	*Dumfries and Galloway*	*Fife*	*Grampian*	*Lothian and Borders*	*Northern*	*Strathclyde*	*Tayside*	*Total Scotland*
Chief constable									
Male	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Deputy chief constable									
Male	1	1	—	1	1	1	1	1	7
Assistant chief constable									
Male	—	—	1	1	3	—	7	3	13
Chief superintendent									
Male	3	1	3	7	14	4	36	6	74
Superintendent									
Male	5	4	9	12	23	6	73	10	142
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Chief inspector									
Male	11	5	10	21	46	15	120	18	246
Female	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	2
Inspector									
Male	26	18	30	60	124	24	352	57	691
Female	1	—	2	—	2	—	9	1	15
Sergeant									
Male	86	54	103	171	345	106	950	151	1,966
Female	2	2	5	6	16	3	21	6	61
Constable									
Male	447	237	528	713	1,672	419	4,709	711	9,436
Female	58	34	61	145	215	53	522	90	1,178
TOTAL MALE	580	321	685	987	2,229	576	6,249	956	12,583
TOTAL FEMALE	61	36	68	151	234	56	555	97	1,258
TOTAL MALE AND FEMALE	641	357	753	1,138	2,463	632	6,804	1,053	13,841

Mental and Physical Handicaps

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the main training programmes and number of places involved for each of the past three years on offer to *(a)* the citizens of Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* individuals in Inverclyde who suffer from mental and physical handicaps; what changes in such training provision are planned in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government's main training programmes, employment training and youth training, offer equality of access and treatment to all eligible people regardless of race, religion, sex or disability. Information about the number of employment training and youth training places on offer to eligible people in Greenock, Port Glasgow and Inverclyde during the last three years is not available separately. Training provision in the current financial year is a matter for Scottish Enterprise; and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

European Community (School Studies)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals concerning the teaching of subjects relating to the history, structure and legislative powers of the European Community he has received from the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum is currently collaborating with the Scottish Examination Board in the production of a series of short courses on European studies. These courses are being developed at the initiative of my right hon. Friend and will be available to pupils from the third year of secondary education onwards to enhance curricular provision in social and environmental studies.

The Gulf

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the most recent guidelines given to local authorities by his officials concerning the payment of the poll tax by those serving in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Scottish Office finance circular No. 4/1991 advised local authorities of a scheme to compensate authorities for community charge income forgone where service personnel normally resident in their area were posted to the Gulf. A copy of that circular was placed in the Library. In addition, the Government have introduced a reimbursement scheme to ensure that service personnel and associated civilians do not have to bear the cost of the community charge for the period of their service in the Gulf. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for administering the scheme under which payments are made to individuals, on application, for the amount of the community charge that they were or are liable to pay while in the Gulf. The Scottish Office Environment Department has written to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities advising it of the scheme.

A77

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all motoring accidents, including fatalities and injuries to persons involved, on the A77 for each year since 1988-89.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The information requested is provided in the following table; figures for 1990 are provisional.

Number of recorded injury accidents on the A77 in the years 1988 to 1990

	North of Ayr		*South of Ayr*		
	Trunk	*Non-trunk (Glasgow)*	*Trunk*	*Non-trunk*	*Total*
All accidents					
1988	98	120	58	4	280
1989	129	104	59	7	299
1990	112	100	61	10	283
Fatal accidents					
1988	3	1	1	0	5
1989	6	0	3	1	10
1990	8	0	0	1	9
Serious accidents					
1988	28	31	20	1	80
1989	41	20	17	2	80
1990	27	16	19	1	63

Note: 1990 figures are provisional.

Rent-to-mortgage Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to date to Scottish Homes arising from the operation of the rent-to-mortgage scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Since the launch of the pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme in October 1989, Scottish Homes' operational costs have been almost £160,000.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been *(a)* the average selling price and *(b)* the average discount to tenants buying their homes under the rent-to-mortgage scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Based on the latest information available, the average selling price and average discount to tenants purchasing their homes under the rent-to-mortgage scheme is £21,100 and 29 per cent. respectively.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland of those applications so far approved under the rent-to-mortgage scheme, what has been *(a)* the average mortgage loan secured and *(b)* the average Scottish Homes loan secured.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Based on the latest information available, the average mortgage loan secured is £8,077 and the average Scottish Homes loan secured is £13,033.

Primary School Testing

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the names of any school board, parent-teacher association, or ad hoc meeting of parents which has made representations to him in favour of compulsory primary school testing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 May 1991]:* It is not our practice to publish details of representations in the manner requested by the hon. Member.

EMPLOYMENT

Radiation Protection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current dose limits and radiation protection standards applied to nuclear industry workers in the United Kingdom and other European Community countries; and what information he has on the reasons for any differences in the limits and standards.

Mr. Forth: Common dose limits and radiation protection standards apply to all workers, including those in the nuclear industry, who work with ionising radiation across the European Community. The directive that sets these standards, European Community directive 80/836/EURATOM as amended by 84/467/EURATOM, is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 and the mirror Northern Ireland legislation.

The Health and Safety Commission has recently published part 4 of the approved code of practice supporting IRR 85 which contains additional guidance on restriction of exposure, but no change of statutory dose limit, to take account of recent revisions of the risk estimates from exposure to ionising radiation. This is an interim measure, pending revision of the European Community directive and subsequent revision of IRR 85 over the next few years.

I cannot comment on the reasons other member states may have for introducing different limits in advance of a revised directive.

Training Companies

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to provide greater security of employment both for those who staff training companies and for those who receive training; and if he will extend the period of review beyond the present one year to assist this cause.

Mr. Jackson: Security of employment for the staff of training provider companies is a matter for those companies. Where a TEC or LEC opts not to contract with a provider or reduces the number of training places the TEC/LEC is required to offer suitable alternative training for the trainees affected.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provisions govern the period of notice to be given to training companies which have been required to close or severely reduce their activities in the current year; and what information he has on the actual notice given.

Mr. Jackson: The period of notice is a matter for negotiation between the training and enterprise council and the training provider concerned.

Employment Training

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why no ET training bonus was paid to Mr. T. Haslam of 105 Pendle road, Denton, Greater Manchester; and whether his Department will make an ex-gratia payment.

Mr. Jackson: The employment training training bonus was payable to trainees who spent at least three months on ET and who had successfully completed their training plan and/or achieved a vocational qualification or a credit towards one. Bonuses underwritten by the Employment Department were discontinued for new entrants to ET in April 1990.

My officials are looking into Mr. Haslam's case, and I will write to the honourable Gentleman shortly when I have their findings.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the protective clothing recommended to be worn when dipping sheep when using an organophosphorus compound; and if he will take steps to have this list publicised.

Mr. Forth: Sheep dips are licensed under the Medicines Act 1968. The veterinary medicines directorate issues licences and product labels carry details of any protective clothing to be used. For the majority of organophosphorus sheep dips the basic clothing consists of protective gloves and a faceshield when handling the concentrate. These are usually supplemented by wellington boots and a waterproof apron during the dipping operation. Operator health and safety, including the use of protective clothing, will be covered in a free leaflet to be published in autumn 1991 by the Health and Safety Executive.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive is satisfied that the toxic waste held at the premises of Wath Recycling since June 1989 is safely contained and that there is no risk to the local population.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 15 May 1991]:* Since June 1989 the Health and Safety Executive has visited the premises of Wath Recycling to assess the company's compliance with health and safety legislation. HSE gave advice and took enforcement action to ensure that the toxic waste was properly stored. On this basis HSE has no

reason to believe that the toxic waste held at these premises is not safely contained, or that there is currently any risk to the local population.

Other authorities also enforce legislation applicable to Wath Recycling including the South Yorkshire hazardous wastes unit, the Rotherham metropolitan borough council environmental health department and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

DEFENCE

Soviet Naval Threat

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment has been made, as part of the "Options for Change" study, of the need to support maritime operations in the Norwegian sea;

(2) what effect changes in the level of Soviet navy deployments have had on his assessment of the future of Rosyth naval base;

(3) what effect changes in the level of Soviet naval shipbuilding have had on his assessment of the future of Rosyth naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All relevant factors are being assessed as part of the continuing work on "Options for Change", and the consequential work on the future of the naval estate.

Naval Shore Bases

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce his decision regarding the future of Royal Navy shore bases.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No decisions have been taken. Proposals will be announced when it is appropriate to do so.

Rosyth and Devonport Dockyards

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the future employment prospects of employees at the Rosyth and Devonport dockyards.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Levels of employment at Devonport and Rosyth royal dockyards are a matter for the commercial judgment of the management companies. The companies are kept informed about the Ministry of Defence's expected refitting programme.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place with his NATO counterparts regarding the future of Rosyth naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on 28 March at column *571*.

Cambodia

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide the United Nations with information regarding *(a)* the use of mines in Cambodia and *(b)* the training given to those military forces in Cambodia that are fighting against the Government of that country and are not part of the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No request for such information has been received from the United Nations.

Thailand

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to request his Thai counterparts to agree to the release of information on the role of British service personnel working in Thailand.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications have taken place between his Department and the solicitors representing Mr. Colin Wallace.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been a number of communications over a period of years with solicitors representing Mr. Colin Wallace. The most recent were a letter to the Department dated 21 September 1990—acknowledged on 1 October—and subsequent payment of fees in connection with the Calcutt inquiry.

Civil Service Appeal Board

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 20 years representatives of his Department have been in private communication with the chairman of the Civil Service appeal board.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am aware of only one occasion when representatives of the Department have been in private communication about undisclosed matters that could be material to the outcome of an appeal.

Personnel Killed in Action

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy regarding the provision of information to the families of service personnel killed in action.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: When notifying next-of-kin of the death of service personnel who are killed in action, it is our policy to provide, in a sympathetic manner, information about the circumstances of the death, where known. Further information is provided when it becomes available. If a board of inquiry is held, a summary of the proceedings can be provided, on request, to the next-of-kin.

The Gulf

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information has been provided to the families of those service personnel who died as a result of attacks by USAF A-10 aircraft during Operation Granby;

(2) what plans he has to provide the families of those service personnel who died as a result of attacks by USAF A-10 aircraft during Operation Granby with further information on this incident; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is his assessment of the cause of the attacks by USAF A-10 aircraft on British forces during Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: An initial report into the incident in which nine British soldiers were killed on 26 February

by fire from United States A-10 aircraft has now been produced following the British military investigation. A formal board of inquiry was convened yesterday to consider this report, to obtain the further information required and to produce findings and conclusions.

We are in close touch with the United States authorities, who are giving all the help they can and have nominated a senior officer to provide a point of contact. The aim is to reach agreed conclusions as soon as possible.

As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 13 May *Official Report*, column *58*, as full an account of the outcome of the inquiry as is possible will be given to the next-of-kin and to Parliament. Until then it would not be proper to comment on the details of the incident or the initial accounts which may have been given at the time by the commanding officer and other members of the regiments.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 17 May 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grant-maintained Status

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have *(a)* become committed to hold a ballot on grant-maintained status, *(b)* voted yes and (i) had the proposals approved, (ii) had the proposal rejected and (iii) await determination of the proposal and *(c)* voted no; how many in each category were the subject of (1) closure or (2) reorganisation proposals; and whether, for schools in categories *(b)*, (ii) and *(c)*, the proposals have been approved or rejected.

Mr. Eggar: Two hundred and seventy-nine schools have been or are committed to holding a ballot on GM status. There have been 160 votes in favour, 47 votes against and 75 results are still awaited. Four schools have embarked on the process twice and one application lapsed.

Of the schools which voted in favour of applying for GM status, 77 applications have been approved and the Secretary of State is minded to approve another. Thirteen have been rejected and 45 have yet to be decided. Applications from a further 24 schools are awaited.

The number of schools in each category which have been the subject of closure or reorganisation proposals were:

		Number subject to closure/ reorganisation proposals
GM proposals:		
Approved	77	20
Minded to approve	1	0
Rejected	13	12
Not yet decided	45	15
Still to be published	24	6
Voted no	47	20
Lapsed applications	1	1
Ballot result pending	75	11
Total number of embarkations	283	85

Nine of the 12 LEA proposals involving schools with rejected GM applications were eventually approved. Twelve of the 20 LEA proposals involving schools which voted not to apply for GM status were approved.

Voluntary-aided Status

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those applications for voluntary-aided status which have been rejected in the last 10 years, giving in each case the dates of application and rejection and the local education authority affected.

Mr. Fallon: The information since 1985 is provided in the following table. The Department has no readily available record of such applications before then. The list includes proposals for the establishment of schools after amalgamation or reorganisation, as well as proposals for brand new schools.

Proposal date	*Decision date*	*Description*	*Local education authority*
19 March 1984	25 February 1986	Secondary reorganisation	Devon
23 November 1984	12 August 1985	Close two schools and establishment of a new secondary	ILEA
23 November 1984	12 August 1985	Close two schools and establishment of a new secondary	ILEA
9 July 1985	28 July 1986	Establishment Lubavitch House school as a voluntary aided instead of an independent	ILEA
6 December 1985	17 September 1986	Reorganisation in Trafford	Trafford
9 December 1985	7 January 1987	Establishment of a new Church of England primary school	Avon
25 April 1986	24 May 1990	Application for aided status for the Islamia primary school	Brent
15 September 1986	8 May 1987	Closure of St. Albans' Church of England secondary and establishment of secondary school	Birmingham
23 October 1986	5 August 1987	Dudley reorganisation	Dudley
2 January 1987	31 October 1988	Change status of Yesodey Hatorah primary school from independent to voluntary aided	ILEA
15 December 1987	12 May 1988	Close one Roman Catholic infant and one Roman Catholic junior school and establishment of new Roman Catholic primary school	Salford
26 February 1988	14 December 1988	Establish new Church of England (voluntary assisted) first school, Creekmoor, Poole	Dorset
4 March 1988	16 February 1989	Establish St. Julian of Norwich high school in substitution for three Roman Catholic secondary modern schools	Trafford
11 November 1988	1 September 1989	Amalgamate St. Bernard's convent and St. Thomas More high schools and establish a secondary school	Essex
6 January 1989	15 September 1989	Amalgamate St. Mary's and St. Veronica's Roman Catholic primary schools and establish a new Roman Catholic primary school	Lancashire
20 January 1989	13 March 1990	Establish a new Roman Catholic first and middle school in substitution for St. Mary's Roman Catholic primary school	Norfolk

Proposal date	Decision date	Description	Local education authority
18 May 1989	5 April 1990	Reorganisation of primary and secondary schools—part 7	Leeds
24 August 1989	10 April 1990	Establish new secondary school (on reorganisation)	Cheshire
13 September 1989	22 January 1991	Establish new Church of England comprehensive school (to replace county school)	Devon
28 September 1989	26 November 1990	Establish new Church of England voluntary aided primary school at West Tytherington, Macclesfield	Cheshire
19 October 1989	2 May 1990	Establish a new voluntary aided primary school (amalgamation)	Salford
26 October 1989	29 November 1990	Establish new primary school in Ventnor road	Sutton
19 December 1989	16 August 1990	Establish new Church of England/Methodist voluntary aided primary school	Avon
15 March 1990	26 October 1990	Establish new Roman Catholic primary school in Sandhurst	Berkshire
13 June 1990	28 January 1991	Establish new voluntary aided secondary school (amalgamation)	Kent
7 September 1990	25 March 1991	Establishment of new secondary school	Somerset
14 September 1990	20 February 1991	Establishment of new primary school	Dudley

Seven-year-olds (Assessment)

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what preparatory steps he is taking to collect reports from teachers administering standard assessment tasks to seven-year-olds as to the practical implications of these tasks in their present form.

Mr. Eggar: A range of methods will be used to obtain teachers' views about the standard assessment tasks—SATs—as part of the evaluation of the first national assessments of seven-year-olds. The School Examinations and Assessment Council—SEAC—will be co-ordinating the information, which will include replies to questionnaires sent to two random samples of teachers. SEAC, together with the Department and Her Majesty's inspectorate—HMI—has also arranged a series of conferences which will be attended by teachers of seven-year-olds. The conferences will give teachers an opportunity to put forward their views about a range of aspects of the assessment arrangements, including the SATs.

Qualifications

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he makes of the proportion of the age group who by their 19th year have achieved (i) five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, or qualifications at national vocational level 2 and (ii) two or more A-level passes, or qualifications at national vocational level 3.

Mr. Eggar: Information on students' attainments in national vocational qualifications is not held centrally, nor is information collected about GCSE passes gained by students in FE colleges.

However, the proportion of all school leavers in England who had gained five or more GCSE passes at grade C or better in the academic year 1988-89 was 31·9 per cent.

As a proportion of the 18-year-old age group, 17·4 per cent. of school leavers and home full-time students in FE colleges had gained two or more A/AS passes, with two AS passes counting as one A-level.

Olympic Games

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether he has met members of the British Olympic Association to discuss Manchester's bid for the Olympic games;

(2) whether he has had meetings with the representatives of the committee for Manchester's Olympic games bid.

Mr. Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave yesterday, *Official Report*, column *221*, to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

East Birmingham Task Force

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what visits or other engagements were undertaken by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science during his visit to the east Birmingham task force area on 21 December 1989.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The programme included visits to Birmingham Heartlands Ltd., St. Peter's college, the Ocean Video project and Just for Starters Ltd. and meetings with representatives of the Grand Metropolitan Community Trust and the Birmingham training and enterprise council.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Eggar: There are as yet no agencies within the Department under the "next steps" initiative, but my right hon. and learned Friend has identified the Department's teachers' pensions branch as a candidate for agency status.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the results from his Department's January survey of teacher vacancies.

Mr. Fallon: In England, in January 1991 there were 3,400 full-time vacancies in maintained nursery and primary schools and 2,200 full-time vacancies in secondary schools. These figures are equivalent to 2·0 per cent. of teachers in service in nursery and primary schools and 1·2 per cent. of teachers in service in secondary schools. The overall total of 5,600 vacancies is equivalent to 1·6 per cent. of full-time teachers in service. These vacancy rates compare with 2·1 per cent. for nursery and primary, 1·5 per cent. for secondary and 1·8 per cent. overall last year, an improvement of around 14 per cent. These figures are most encouraging, especially for London, where the improvement on last year is of the order of 33 per cent. The full published details of the survey have been placed in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration Appeals Tribunal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General for what reasons the Home Office's amplified grounds of appeal were not placed before the chairman of the immigration appeals tribunal when he reached a decision on 28 February; when the amplified grounds were placed before the chairman of the IAT; and if he will arrange for the chairman's decision to be expedited in view of the compassionate circumstances of the case.

The Attorney-General: The Home Office's amplified grounds of appeal in the case of Mr. Liwa Uddin were not placed before the chairman of the immigration appeals tribunal—IAT—when he reached a decision on 28 February because of an administrative error on the part of the immigration appellate authorities which resulted in the amplified grounds of appeal not being linked to Mr. Uddin's case file.

The grounds of appeal were subsequently placed before the chairman of the IAT on 17 April 1991, who dismissed the Home Office appeal in his determination of 7 May 1991.

Official Secrets Act

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions and on what basis he has been asked to authorise a grant of immunity to a civil servant from prosecution under the Official Secrets Act 1911 as part of inquiries into the leak of law officers' letters to Secretaries of State and other private individuals.

The Attorney-General: I have never been asked to authorise a grant of immunity from prosecution in such circumstances. The hon. Member will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) informed the House on 23 January 1986, *Official Report*, column 451, that my predecessor had authorised the then head of the civil service to tell an official that he had my predecessor's authority to say that, provided that the head of the civil service received full co-operation in his inquiry into the disclosure of parts of a letter written by me, the official concerned would not be prosecuted in respect of anything said during the course of the inquiry.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Policy

Sir Bernard Braine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy in regard to providing aid for the governments of countries where human rights are openly violated and where there is evidence that traffic in drugs intended for export to the outside world is permitted.

Mrs. Chalker: A country's human rights record and its attitude towards illicit drugs production and trafficking are among the factors taken into account in allocating aid programme assistance among countries.

Economic Aid

Sir Bernard Braine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries currently receiving British economic aid.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the right hon. Member to the list of developing country recipients of gross bilateral aid in "British Aid Statistics 1985-89", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The following countries of eastern Europe have received assistance from the know-how fund: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union.

Burma

Sir Bernard Braine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the policy of denying aid to the Government of Burma, other than humanitarian aid to the refugees on the Thai-Burmese border, has yet had any effect on the repressive policies of the Burmese Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Despite widespread international condemnation, there is still no evidence that the Burmese authorities intend to transfer power to the democratically elected representatives of the Burmese people or to put an end to their repressive human rights policies.

Botswana

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the environmental implications of subsidised beef imports from Botswana into the EC under the Lomé trade agreement in terms of *(a)* the livestock stocking policy and *(b)* the veterinary fencing policy under EC disease control regulations.

Mrs. Chalker: No official assessment has been made. This is a matter for the Government of Botswana in the first instance.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the use of levies returned to Botswana in subsidies for beef imports into the EC under the Lomé trade agreement.

Mrs. Chalker: Under the preferential import quota scheme for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries including Botswana, beef imported into the Community is subject only to 10 per cent. of the normal import levy. No portion of this levy is reimbursed to the exporting industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Forces

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now make it his policy to answer questions relating to special forces.

The Prime Minister: No.

Education and Training

Mr. Straw: To ask the Prime Minister when the promised White Paper on 16 to 19-year-olds' education and training will be published; and which Department is taking the lead on this.

The Prime Minister: The White Paper on education and training will be published shortly. It is being produced jointly by my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. A White Paper on education and training in Scotland will also be published shortly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Olympic Games

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to meet representatives of the British Olympic Association and the Manchester Olympic Committee.

The Prime Minister: It is for my hon. Friend the Minister of Sport to discuss with those concerned how best the Government can help to promote Manchester's bid for the 2000 Olympic games. The Government wish Manchester every success.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Maintenance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the amount of benefit expenditure on lone parents recovered from relatives liable to pay maintenance, for each year from 1978 to the latest available date.

Mr. Jack: The first year for which complete data are available is 1980-81. The data cover all payments received from liable relatives and include a small amount of maintenance paid for other families besides lone parents. The information is in the table.

	£ million (1989-90 prices)
1980-81	175·6
1981-82	207·0
1982-83	209·0
1983-84	197·6
1984-85	186·2
1985-86	197·6
1986-87	—[1]
1987-88	181·2
1988-89	176·6
1989-90	205·6

[1] Data not available as, no annual statistical inquiry, which collects the bulk of the required information, was undertaken during 1986-87 because of a change in the collection arrangements.

NB: The figures include estimates of benefit saved as a result of payments from liable relatives removing entitlement to benefit.
Source: Departmental records.

Expenditure

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide the information given in his answer of 3 May, *Official Report*, columns *349-51*, at constant 1989-90 prices.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

	£ million (1989-90 prices)	
	Council rents (rent rebates)	*Community charge benefit and rate rebates*
1983-84	2,732	1,681
1984-85	2,817	1,778
1985-86	2,860	1,842
1986-87	2,913	1,968
1987-88	2,864	1,944
1988-89	2,851	1,460
1989-90	2,856	1,460
1990-91	2,951	2,109

Note: Revalued to 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator.

Social Fund

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 28 February and 31 March.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.
28 February 1991—616 cases outstanding for more than one month.
31 March 1991—1,013 cases outstanding for more than one month.
Additional inspectors have been recruited.

Child Benefit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing the amounts by which child benefit could be increased at no extra cost, if *(a)* the proposed extra £2 for first children were distributed evenly between all children and *(b)* third and subsequent children received £1 a week more than first and second children.

Mr. Jack [*holding answer 22 April 1991*]: The £1 increase in April 1991 for the eldest eligible child is estimated to cost some £250 million. The full-year cost of increasing that rate by a further £1 in October will be some £355 million. If this £605 million were redistributed in the ways suggested, without carrying them through into income-related benefits, the rate for *(a)* all children would be £8·60 compared with £9·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·50 for all other children from October, and *(b)* that for first and second children would be £8·45 and for third and subsequent children, £9·45.

ENVIRONMENT

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the financial costs to his Department in commissioning and publishing the research

document "Competitive Tendering for Local Authority Services—Initial Experiences"; and if he will indicate the future costs of any further research into compulsory competitive tendering that his Department is planning.

Mr. Portillo: The figure is £83,000. This was the first part of a three-year study, the remainder of which is estimated to cost £98,000.

Environmental Education

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, as part of his programme to promote environmental education, he will make available resources for the distribution to schools, colleges and other similar bodies of copies of relevant environmental publications.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the Department's "Environment in Trust" leaflets were circulated to all secondary schools in England and Wales on publication. These leaflets and other publications, including the recent "Wake Up" leaflet, are available to anyone on application. The Department also supports the preparation and distribution of educational materials by our grant-in-aid environmental bodies, and by those organisations which receive funds from the special grants programme.

Wath Recycling

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 9 May, *Official Report*, column *551*, what assessment Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has made of the security with which the toxic waste held at Wath Recycling since June 1989 is contained.

Mr. Trippier: Contaminated copper hydroxide sludge was delivered to the Wath site during the week commencing 5 June 1989. After discussions between the South Yorkshire hazardous waste unit, the Health and Safety Executive, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, the company and the producer of the material, it was agreed that the sludge should be repacked in steel drums and stored in a safe place on site, pending a decision on its final destination. The statutory control authority for waste storage and disposal is the SYHWA. HMIP has no statutory duties in respect of this matter and has had no further involvement.

People Sleeping Rough

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the initiative to provide accommodation for people sleeping rough in central London.

Sir George Young: I am glad to be able to report that there has been significant progress on this initiative.

The Housing Corporation is announcing today the allocation of over £50 million to more than 50 housing associations in London, to provide some 1,400 bedspaces in permanent homes for people sleeping rough or in hostels in central London. This allocation is part of the total provision of £96 million over three years which my Department has made for rough sleepers in central London.

Today's allocations will bring to more than 2,300 the number of places in move-on housing for rough sleepers being provided this year and next. In addition, some 1,000 additional places in direct access hostels should be in place within the next few months. So far, about 1,000 places are available, in a mixture of move-on housing, hostels and short-term shelters.

The first Department of Health hostel for homeless mentally ill people was opened last month. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health is today announcing proposed additional revenue funding of £2·7 million over three years, of which his Department will provide £1·5 million and the Mental Health Foundation will endeavour to raise £1·2 million from private sources. This will provide further psychiatric support for people sleeping rough and in hostels in London.

The initiative is beginning to have a significant effect on the numbers of people sleeping rough in central London. The voluntary groups estimated in January that there were about 1,000 people sleeping rough in seven main areas in central London. Last month, the estimate was that numbers in these areas had come down to about 500.

I hope that this progress will continue as more accommodation becomes available. I am very grateful for the very positive way in which the voluntary groups, the housing associations and the London boroughs have responded to the initiative. Our aim remains to make it unnecessary for anyone to sleep rough in central London.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bailiffs

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to issue a code of conduct for bailiffs attached to magistrates courts.

Mr. John Patten: We intend to issue best practice guidance shortly on the use of bailiffs by magistrates courts.

Immigration

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of individuals accepted by the immigration authorities for permanent settlement in the United Kingdom for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many individuals came from the Indian sub-continent and from Africa.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information for 1986 to 1988 is published in table 15 of the Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1989", Cm. 1124, and for 1989 and 1990 in table 1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin 3/91 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Third and Fourth Quarters and Year 1990". A copy of each publication is held in the Library.

Coaches (Speeding)

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of convictions of coach drivers for speeding offences in each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: The motoring offences information collected centrally does not include the details of the type of vehicle involved.

Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding has been provided to the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association in the last five years; and what funding is proposed for 1991-92.

Mr. John Patten: Prior to 1990-91, no contribution from central funds was made to the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association. In the financial year 1990-91, a contribution of £40,000 was made by the Home Office to the association. Provision is available for a contribution of £40,000 in the current financial year, of which £10,000 has so far been paid to the association.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role is played in the provision of advice to his Department by *(a)* the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and *(b)* the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.

Mr. John Patten: The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council is constituted under section 29 of the Fire Services Act 1947 to advise my right hon. Friend on matters as to which he is required by the Act to consult it, or on any other matters arising in connection with the operation of the Act which the council has taken into consideration, apart from matters relating to conditions of service and the maintenance of discipline. My right hon. Friend is responsible for appointing the members of the council, who include representatives of the interests of fire authorities and of persons employed as members of fire brigades. The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association is one member of the council. The association is also represented on the joint committees which report to the council and to the Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. Apart from its role in submitting advice to my right hon. Friend through the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association has no special role in the provision of advice to the Home Office.

Birmingham Six

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is considering final proposals for financial compensation for each of the Birmingham Six; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: On the advice of the independent assessor, my right hon. Friend has made interim payments of compensation to each of the six men.

The solicitors representing the men have been asked to supply any information which they wish the assessor to take into account when determining the final sum. It is for the assessor to decide what the amount should be and when he has the information he needs to reach a decision. In accordance with the provisions of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, my right hon. Friend will accept the assessor's recommendation.

Criminal Justice System

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the Royal Commission on the criminal justice system will consider the retirement age of those dispensing justice;

(2) whether the Royal Commission on the criminal justice system will consider the work of the Crown forensic service;

(3) if the Royal Commission on the criminal justice system will consider replacing the appeal court system with a less adversarial court;

(4) whether the Royal Commission on the criminal justice system will consider the establishment of a national police force.

Mr. John Patten: The Royal Commission on criminal justice has been given very wide terms of reference, and it is for the commission to determine the way in which it will carry out its task and to report accordingly.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are proposed to allow hon. Members to give evidence to the royal commission on the Criminal Justice System.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the royal commission to determine the way in which it will carry out its task, but I understand that an announcement will be made shortly about the arrangements for the submission of evidence to the commission.

Crime

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for *(a)* total crime and offences, *(b)* total crimes, *(c)* total offences, *(d)* serious assaults and *(e)* housebreaking for each year since 1979 inclusive; if he will give the percentage increase or decrease for each year compared with the figure for the previous year together with the total increase or decrease since 1979; and what was the percentage clear-up rate for crimes in each of the years since 1979 inclusive.

Mr. John Patten: The information for England and Wales is published annually in tables 2.1 and 2.18 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" and tables A and D of Home Office statistical bulletin 4/91, copies of which are available in the Library.

Corresponding information for Scotland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Sports Grounds

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the organisations and individuals which he has consulted on extending mandatory all-seated accommodation to sports grounds other than football grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975; what are the methods by which and the dates on which such consultations will take place; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what are the organisations and individuals which he plans to consult on extending mandatory all-seated accommodation to sports grounds other than football grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975; what are the methods by which and the dates on which such consultations will take place; when the consultation period will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: During the course of last year Home Office officials held separate discussions with members of the executive committee of the rugby league, with officials of the rugby football union and, together with colleagues from the Welsh Office, with officials of the Welsh rugby

football union. We have consulted and are currently awaiting the views of the Association of Chief Police Officers on the extension of mandatory all seated accommodation to these sports. My right hon. Friend will make a statement in due course. No consultations have been held with the cricket authorities because most designated cricket grounds are already wholly or substantially all seated. The designation of sports grounds under the 1975 Act is confined to grounds used for association football, rugby league, rugby union and cricket.

Press Complaints Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission; and when he proposes to bring forward legislation as recommended by the Calcutt commission.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend and I met the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission on 14 March. The legislation recommended by the Calcutt committee is still under consideration.

Asylum Applications

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of *(a)* asylum applications granted and *(b)* cases in which exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom was granted in (i) 1988, (ii) 1989 and (iii) 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest available information is given in the table:

Grants of asylum and exceptional leave to remain, 1988-89[1]

Year	Grants of asylum	[2]Grants of exceptional leave to remain
1988	968	2,263
1989	3,045	5,680
[2]1990	1,600	3,900

[1] Includes associated dependants.
[2] Provisional estimates which probably understate the true levels.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list *(a)* the number of individual applications for asylum in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the number of dependants of the principal applicants for asylum received in (i) 1988, (ii) 1989, (iii) 1990 and (iv) January to March in the current year;

(2) how many claims for asylum were outstanding as at *(a)* 31 December 1988, *(b)* 31 December 1989 and *(c)* 31 December 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will reply as soon as possible.

Naturalisation (Members' Letters)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it takes his Department to reply to letters from hon. Members about constituency cases involving naturalisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During March the average time taken to reply to enquiries from hon. Members on nationality matters, including those referring to naturalisation, was 22 days.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Newbury may expect a reply to his letter of 18 February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Passport Agency and the Forensic Science Service Agency were established this April. The Fire Service college is a firm candidate for agency status, with a proposed launch date of 1 April 1992. Other parts of the Department are also being considered as candidates.

Foreign Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals serving a sentence of imprisonment in England and Wales have been transferred to complete their sentence in their country of origin in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Transfers of foreign inmates under the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984

	Number
1986	10
1987	6
1988	7
1989	11
1990	13

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in the north-east region have successfully applied for enterprise initiative consultancies since the inception of the scheme.

Mr. Leigh: From the inception of the scheme in January 1988 to 14 May 1991, 3,926 applications for enterprise initiative consultancies have been received in the north-east. These have resulted in 3,883 approved projects, of which 1,283 projects have been completed.

HEALTH

Health Authorities and Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual rate of remuneration of *(a)* chairmen of health authorities, *(b)* members of health authorities, *(c)* chairmen of health trusts and *(d)* members of health trusts as at 1 April 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Details of the remuneration paid to health authority chairmen and members in 1988, 1989 and 1990 are set out in the tables. The rates for 1991 are still under consideration.

Chairmen of Health Authorities

Regional Health Authorities

	£
1 April 1988	11,709
1 April 1989	12,462
1 April 1990	18,921

District Health Authorities

	£
1 April 1988	11,709
1 April 1989	12,462
1 April 1990	
Band 1	17,437
Band 2	15,503
Band 3	13,674

Notes:

Band 1 Teaching DHAs with revenue budget of £45 million or more 1985-86, and non-teaching DHAs with revenue budget of £60 million 1985-86.

Band 2 Teaching DHAs with revenue budget on £45 million or less 1985-86, and non-teaching DHAs with revenue budget of £30 million to £60 million 1985-86.

Band 3 Non-teaching DHAs with revenue budget of £30 million or less 1985-86.

Family Health Service Authorities

	£
1 April 1988	5,000
1 April 1989	5,000
1 April 1990	
Band 1	11,395
Band 2	10,600
Band 3	9,805

Notes:

Band 1—Population over 750,000.

Band 2—Population 250,000 to 750,000.

Band 3—Population under 250,000.

Special Health Authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals

	£
1 April 1988	11,709
Eastman Dental Hospital	9,758
1 April 1989	12,462
Eastman Dental Hospital	10,385
1 April 1990	
Band A	15,503
Band B	13,674
Band C	11,395

Notes:

Band A—Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's SHA.

Band B—Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals SHA.
Moorfields Eye Hospital SHA
Hospitals for Sick Children SHA.
National Hospitals for Neurology and Neurosurgery SHA.
Royal Marsden Hospital SHA.
Royal Brompton National Heart and Lung Hospitals SHA.

Band C—Eastman Dental Hospital SHA.

National Health Service Trusts from 1 January 1991

	£
Band 1	17,610
Band 2	15,659
Band 3	13,812

Notes:

Band 1—Trusts with turnover in excess of £50 million.

Band 2—Trusts with turnover between £20 million and £50 million.

Band 3—Trusts with turnover of less than £20 million.

Members of Health Authorities and Trusts

	£
From 26 July 1990	
RHA	5,000
From 17 September 1990	
DHA	5,000
FHSA	5,000
From 1 January 1991	
Non-executive directors of NHS Trusts	5,000

AIDS

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate has been made of the cost of treating AIDS patients in the national health service for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will give the figures separately for men and women.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have made available the following sums of earmarked money to regional health authorities as a contribution towards the costs incurred in helping prevent the spread of HIV infection and providing treatment, counselling and support for those affected by HIV and AIDS.

	£ million
1987-88	25·1
1988-89	61·7
1989-90	122·5
1990-91	129·5
1991-92	137·3

Separate figures for the costs of treatment of men and women are not available.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether patients who have grievances regarding their treatment by hospital trusts will be able to have them referred to the health service ombudsman in the same way as patients treated in directly managed hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. Schedule 9, paragraph 18(10) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 provides for trusts to be subject to investigation by the health service commissioner.

Nurses (Regrading Appeals)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses *(a)* in Doncaster and *(b)* in England and Wales had regrading appeals outstanding at 31 March.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of 22 appeals on behalf of nurses employed by Doncaster district health authority were outstanding at regional level at 31 March 1991. None was outstanding at national level.

The information available on appeals outstanding at regional and national level in England up to 31 March 1991 is shown in the table:

Appeals outstanding (England)

	Number
Regional	15,359
National	476

Information on district level appeals is not held centrally.

Questions on clinical grading appeals in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Correspondence

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Minister for Health will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden of 28 February.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend replied on 16 May.

People Sleeping Rough

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the initiative to provide accommodation and psychiatric care for mentally ill people sleeping rough in central London.

Mr. Dorrell: I was pleased to be able to open formally last month the first of the specialist hostels to be funded under the Department of Health's programme. Work is continuing on a further five hostel schemes, all of which are expected to open before the end of this financial year. New community-based psychiatric teams, along with an evaluation team, have been set up in the three Thames health regions concerned, and are already working with mentally ill people on the streets.

Today I can announce that, in collaboration with the Mental Health Foundation, we expect to make available further revenue funding totalling about £2·7 million over the next three years. The Department of Health will provide £1·5 million, and the Mental Health Foundation will be endeavouring to raise the remaining £1·2 million from private sources, subject to detailed consideration of the projects.

This extra money will give central London's health and social services authorities the opportunity to expand their community psychiatric teams, to enable them to provide support for mentally ill people within the new direct access hostels being established by the Department of the Environment under its rough sleepers initiative. Progress on the latter initiative is the subject of an announcement today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning.

HIV

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the results of the Medical Research Council's anonymised HIV surveys will be available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are today publishing the first results of the Government funded Medical Research Council's anonymised HIV surveys. These surveys involved testing blood from a wide selection of patients who have had blood taken for other purposes. Great care must be taken in interpreting these preliminary results because the samples were small. Nevertheless they show that the priority we have given to public education campaigns is justified.

The first results show that the overall prevalance of HIV infection in women attending certain ante-natal clinics in inner London is one in 500. These figures show a fivefold range from about one in 200 to more than one in 1,000 in the inner London clinics surveyed.

In the small number of clinics surveys in outer London and the south-east there was a wide range from about one in 300 to one in 2,500, but half these clinics had no positive results.

In other parts of the country, only one test in 16,000 in ante-natal clinics was positive.

Among heterosexual women attending certain sexually transmitted diseases clinics in inner London the prevalence rate was one in 500; however, it was one in 100 for heterosexual men. Among homosexual and bisexual men attending the same clinics there is evidence of continuing transmission. The current prevalence rate is one in five.

These initial results, though preliminary, provide valuable information to help us target our response to the epidemic. We intend to establish and lead an AIDS action group to reinforce action in areas with high prevalence rates. The group will address issues such as access to local services, local prevention and education initiatives and how to reach particular groups such as women, children and ethnic minorities. It will draw on the experience of local service providers and include within its membership representatives from health and local authorities, voluntary organisations and local communities.

South Derbyshire DHA

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated by South Derbyshire district health authority for the latest year for which figures are available and the previous year.

Mr. Dorrell: The table lists the number of in-patients, out-patients and day cases treated by Southern Derbyshire health authority for 1988-89 and 1989-90—the last year for which figures are available.

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*Percentage increase*
In-patients[1]	55,673	61,608	10·7
Out-patients	314,990	324,962	3·2
Day cases	4,977	5,255	5·6

[1]The inpatient figures represent Finished Consultant Episodes.
Source: KP70 and KH09 returns.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Strangford Lough

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the proposed designation of Strangford lough as a marine nature reserve from Strangford lough advisory co-ordinating council, Strangford lough nature conservation association, local farming organisations and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Since the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland announced its recommendation that Strangford lough should be designated as a marine nature reserve, the Department has received representations from a wide range of bodies including those referred to by the hon. Gentleman. Many of these representations have centred round the future management of the lough, rather than the designation of the marine nature reserve itself.

The Department will be issuing a consultative paper at the beginning of June setting out its thinking on the future management structure for the lough and on a marine nature reserve. The consultation paper will be circulated widely and officials will be arranging meetings at which they will further explain the proposals. The district councils, the Strangford lough advisory and co-ordinating committee, the Strangford Lough Nature Conservation Association, farming organisations and other relevant bodies will be included in the consultation process. I hope all those interested will take the opportunity to express their views in as positive a way as possible. Following consultation the Department will produce a document containing policies and proposals.

Factory Space

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of factory space available for letting from the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Development Unit at 30 September 1990 analysed by parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Needham: Factory space and workspace accommodation available for letting at 30 September 1990 was as follows:

Constituency	*IDB—Available lettable space sq ft*	*LEDU—Available workspace sq ft*
Belfast East	Nil	Nil
Belfast North	Nil	65,165
Belfast South	16,140	Nil
Belfast West	8,178	15,960
East Antrim	Nil	1,194
East Londonderry	3,228	1,942
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	3,228	26,668
Foyle	16,140	20,204
Lagan Valley	Nil	652
Mid Ulster	41,426	10,802
Newry and Armagh	41,125	26,642
North Antrim	35,336	14,454
North Down	Nil	Nil
South Antrim	31,204	Nil
South Down	17,007	7,172
Strangford	Nil	Nil
Upper Bann	29,246	26,950
Total	242,258	217,805

Although the Local Enterprise Development Unit does not own or let factory space it funds the local enterprise programme which aims to establish a network of local enterprise agencies throughout Northern Ireland. Local enterprise agencies provide managed workspace accommodation for new and existing small businesses in units of various sizes.

Company Assistance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the companies assisted by the Industrial Development Board who located factories in each of the district council areas in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991.

Mr. Needham: During the period from 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991 there were nine new inward investment projects for which offers of assistance were accepted. To date two of these projects—Keith Prowse Holdings Ltd. in Belfast city council area and Webtech (NI) Ltd. in Fermanagh district council area—have been made public. The remaining seven projects, which have not yet been announced, will be located in the following district council areas: Antrim, Ballymena, Belfast (two), Magherafelt, Newry and Mourne, and Newtownabbey.

In addition, four other inward investments for which no selective financial assistance was offered were secured. Two of these have been made public—Inland Revenue in the Belfast city council area and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the Newry and Mourne district council area. The other two projects, as yet unannounced, will be located in the Antrim and Belfast council areas.

Desmond and Sons Ltd., an existing Northern Ireland company, located a new factory in the Dungannon district council area.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the special development initiative led by the Industrial Development Board entails for the constituency of South Down.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment is co-ordinating the involvement of various Government Departments in progressing the Downpatrick regeneration strategy. Within this framework IDB is exploring the availability of a number of sites which might be suitable for industrial development purposes. IDB is also associated with the Department of Economic Development-led Newry initiative which, although primarily aimed at the Newry urban area, is likely to be of benefit to neighbouring areas.

IDB officials have recently met Down district council to discuss industrial development in the area and IDB's United States-based overseas representatives have also met a local group to discuss the establishment of links between South Down and Chicago. Some 70 companies in the South Down area will be provided with information about an IDB trade mission to Chicago in October 1991.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will name the organisations or concerns which have so far expressed an interest in purchasing power stations in Northern Ireland or investing in Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: No organisation or concern has yet formally registered an interest in purchasing the power stations or in acquiring shares in NIE's successor company. All such expressions of interest would in any event represent commercially confidential information and would not normally be published.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he or his officials have had with the chairman of the Northern Ireland electricity service concerning the drafting of the minute relating to the decision of the Northern Ireland electricity service not to renew the contract of its chief executive.

Mr. Needham: The drafting of the minutes of the board of Northern Ireland Electricity is a matter for the chairman and company secretary.

The chairman of NIE meets Ministers and officials on a regular basis, and advised the Department of Economic Development of the discussions at the meeting of the board on 3 May.

Millisle Tourist Project

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many covers on control boxes of electric columns in Millisle, County Down have been removed this year; what proposals he has to make these covers more secure; and if he will make a statement on the inherent danger to children and the public in Millisle by these exposed electrical installations.

Mr. Needham: No covers have been removed this year. Arrangements exist for repairing and securing any control boxes which may be damaged.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a footway at Moss road, Millisle, from the Orange hall as far as the car park on the opposite side of Moss road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: A scheme to extend the existing footway on the south side of the Moss road, Millisle from the Orange hall to the A2 junction is planned for the next financial year subject to finance being available. There are no proposals to provide a footway on the opposite side of the road.

Schools and Colleges (Rates)

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what services and support local district councils provide for secondary schools and further education colleges in respect of rates payments.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* There are two rates in Northern Ireland, the regional rate determined by the Department of Finance and Personnel, which funds regional services, including education, and the district rate struck by each district council to meet the costs of district services which include the provision of leisure facilities—playing fields, leisure centres, swimming pools, and so on—and environmental services—refuse collection and disposal, street cleansing and litter control, building control, environmental health enforcement and so on. District services are provided for secondary schools and further education colleges.

WALES

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time speech therapists are currently employed by each Welsh health district board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is given in the following table:

Number of staff in post as at 30 April 1991

District health authority	Full-time	Part-time
Pembrokeshire	4	3
Clwyd	18	10
East Dyfed	12	3
Gwent	16	5
Gwynedd	9	3
Mid Glamorgan	19	4
Powys	6	3
South Glamorgan	26	10
West Glamorgan	8	5

There has been a significant and welcomed increase in the number of speech therapists employed by district health authorities in Wales since this Government took office. Since 1979 the number of whole-time equivalent speech therapists employed has increased from 65 to 154, an increase of 137 per cent.

Brymbo Steelworks

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the quality of training provided for people from Brymbo steelworks who were recently made redundant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Training for those recently made redundant at the Brymbo steelworks is provided under the iron and steel employees' readaptation benefits scheme which is jointly funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Commission. In the course of administering the scheme the Department of Trade and Industry has discussed the quality of training, both with trainees and with training providers, and has drawn apparent deficiencies to the attention of the providers. That Department is continuing to monitor the situation closely.

TRANSPORT

Severn Crossing

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require that local companies and jobs will be given priority when considering supply and service contracts for the John Laing-GTM second Severn crossing joint venture.

Mr. Chope: The concession company for the second Severn crossing scheme will be required to comply with the normal competitive rules for sub-contracting. It will not therefore be allowed to discriminate on the grounds of nationality or location in its selection of sub-contractors. But I hope that local firms and individuals will bid for the work.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which authorities are responsible for determining the charges or tolls for the carriage of freight traffic through the channel tunnel for those portions of the journey *(a)* on the continent *(b)* within the United Kingdom and *(c)* between Frethun and Cheriton; and if

the payer of such moneys can be made aware of the components of any combined charge for any class or quantity of traffic attributable to each part of the journey.

Mr. Freeman: Charging for international rail freight services through the channel tunnel will be a commercial matter for British Rail and SNCF, who have a commercial agreement with Eurotunnel for the use of the tunnel.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance is being provided out of public funds, other than that for grants toward the costs of private railway sidings, for the development or equipment of freight terminals for cross-channel rail traffic on the basis of *(a)* general desirability and *(b)* reduction in road congestion.

Mr. Freeman: Investment in terminals for channel tunnel freight services is a commercial matter for British Rail and, where appropriate, its private sector partners. British Rail is prohibited under section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 from receiving Government grants for international rail services.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is British Rail's target date for signing a contract for building the main fleet of international trains for the channel tunnel route; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when British Rail will order the fleet of 18-coach Euro-express trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail, SNCF and SNCB signed the contract for the 30 inter-capital trainsets in December 1989. British Rail are still discussing with the manufacturers the design of and terms for the specially modified trainsets needed for north of London services.

Essex Roads

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to increase the capital allocation to Essex county council for road construction in this or following financial years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The allocation of transport supplementary grant, annual capital guideline and supplementary credit approval for local authority expenditure on roads in 1991-92 was announced last December. The resources available were fully distributed among the 108 authorities and none held back for later allotment.

The allocations are decided in the light of information in authorities' annual transport policies and programme documents, which have to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of July each year. The allocations for Essex county council for 1992-93 will be considered on this basis, taking into account the competing bids from other highway authorities and the total resources available. It is not therefore possible to anticipate the outcome.

Kingsway Underpass

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long the underpass from Waterloo bridge to Kingsway has been closed to traffic; when it will be re-opened and how much is the estimated cost of the work.

Mr. Chope: Westminster city council, which is the highway authority for the underpass, closed it on 18 January 1989. I understand that it is to re-open within the next few weeks and that the estimated cost of refurbishment is £4 million.

24 Claremont Road, E11

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the Waltham Forest environmental health officer with regard to his Department's property at 24 Claremont road, E11; and what action he proposes to take on it.

Mr. Chope: Yes; I have placed in the Library a copy of the environmental health officer's report about 24 Claremont road, E11 dated 27 June 1990. This property has been acquired in connection with A12 Hackney-M11 link road and is temporarily occupied by tenants of the Department.

The Department has offered alternative accommodation to the tenants in order to vacate the property. They have turned the offer down. Since the report, essential repairs have been carried out. It is our intention to demolish the property after the tenancy agreement expires in November 1991.

British Transport Police

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines are laid down for investigations by the British Transport Police in cases of sudden death.

Mr. Freeman: The guidelines for investigations by the British Transport police in cases of sudden death are the same as those for Home Department forces. Investigations are conducted on behalf of Her Majesty's coroners of the areas in which such deaths occur. In apropriate cases, the facts are brought to the attention of the Crown prosecution service.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what statutory bases the British Transport Police is required to investigate and submit reports to Her Majesty's coroners in cases of sudden death involving British Rail trains.

Mr. Freeman: The British Transport police in its present form is established by section 69 of the Transport Act 1962 and its jurisdiction stems from section 53 of the British Transport Commission Act 1949 as amended. Constables are appointed in accordance with the provisions of the British Transport Commission Act 1949 as amended by section 70 of the Transport Act 1962, section 43 of the British Transport Commission Act 1962 and section 25 of the British Railways Act 1978. Parallel provisions apply in Scotland. BTP constables have the same powers and duties as any other constable in England, Wales and Scotland while acting within their jurisdiction. Within that jurisdiction, investigations into sudden deaths are conducted on behalf of Her Majesty's coroners in the same way as those conducted by other police forces.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities of a technical and engineering nature are available to the British Transport police when investigating cases of sudden death suspected of having being caused by mechanical failure.

Mr. Freeman: The British Transport police has full access to the forensic science service, Home Office

pathologists, the Metropolitan police forensic laboratory, and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. In addition, it can use each and every technical and engineering facility avialable within British Rail. Should independent advice not available from these organisations be necessary, the force is free to obtain that advice from the most appropriate source, including the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the practice of the British Transport police with regard to making use of engineering and mechanical reports in the control and possession of British Rail when submitting reports to Her Majesty's coroners in cases of sudden death.

Mr. Freeman: The practice of the British Transport police is the same as that of any Home Department police force when investigating sudden deaths. If any relevant report is held by British Rail, it will be sought and, if obtained, disclosed to Her Majesty's coroner. If such a report is not disclosed by British Rail, Her Majesty's coroner will be informed of its believed existence enabling him to exercise his power to order the appearance of witnesses to give evidence on the contents at the inquest should he deem it necessary.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there is a complaints procedure similar to the police complaints procedure in respect of the activities of the British Transport police.

Mr. Freeman: Arrangements for dealing with public complaints concerning the British Transport police are identical to those for Home Department police forces in England and Wales, except that the final appellate authority in respect of the police disciplinary appeals is the Secretary of State for Transport and not the Home Secretary. Arrangements in Scotland are identical to those operating in other Scottish police forces.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will list the present members of the British Transport police committee, indicating which members are employed full time and part time;

(2) what are the primary duties and function of the British Transport police committee;

(3) which members of the British Transport police committee are now, or have been, employees of the British Railways Board.

Mr. Freeman: The present membership of the British Transport police committee is as follows:

Mr. J. C. P. Edmonds *(Chairman)*
Mr. D. Tunnicliffe
Mr. C. J. D. Driver
Mr. A. P. Watkinson
Dr. J. D. C. Prideaux
Sir Lawrence Byford CBE, QPM, DL, LLD

All the above mentioned members are current full-time members or employees of the British Railways Board except for Mr. Tunnicliffe and Sir Lawrence Byford. Membership of the committee is not, however, a full-time responsibility.

The principal duties and function of the committee are set out in paragraph 4*(g)* of the British Transport Police Force Scheme 1963, made under section 69 of the Transport Act 1962. These are primarily to supervise the administration of the force, to make recommendations to the British Railways and London Regional Transport boards on any matter concerning the force, to exercise the powers of the Railways Board under section 53 of the British Transport Commission Act 1949 as amended by section 70 of the Transport Act 1962 and to do on behalf and in the name of the Railways Board all other things which may be necessary for performing its functions under the BTP force scheme.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish regulations requiring speed limiters to be fitted to heavy goods vehicles; and whether he will extend the requirement to vehicles already in service.

Mr. Chope: A major consultation exercise earlier this year has shown that there is overwhelming support for fitting speed limiters to new vehicles. This measure should significantly reduce both the number and severity of accidents involving speeding HGVs. I am therefore pleased to confirm that draft regulations are being published today, and they will require all new HGVs over 7·5 tonnes gross vehicle weight to be fitted with speed limiters as from 1 August 1992.

I am also proposing today to bring forward regulations which would require speed limiters to be fitted to at least the biggest and heaviest articulated vehicles first registered after 1 August 1988. There was firm support for this in the consultation exercise.

Speed limiters would pay for themselves in terms of fuel savings in just a few years and there would be environmental benefits, too.

Private Bills

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will complete his consultations on the 1988 report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure (HL Paper 97, HC625) insofar as it relates to transport matters.

Mr. Rifkind: We have completed our consideration of the responses to the Government's consultation document "Private Bills and New Procedures" (HMSO ref Cm. 1110) which set out proposals for a new order-making procedure to replace private Bills as the method by which railway, rapid transit and a wider range of harbour works would in future be authorised, as the Joint Committee recommended. Over 100 bodies or individuals responded and the majority supported the principle of the proposed reform, which would relieve Parliament of a significant, and growing, volume of private business relating to works projects.

The Government are persuaded, in the light of the generally favourable reaction to the proposals, that legislation should be introduced at the earliest opportunity to establish new order-making powers for railway, tramway and other rapid transit systems, and inland waterway works, and to extend the range of harbour orders. The procedures will be broadly similar to those outlined in paragraphs 14 and 15 and 23 to 29 of the consultation document except in regard to two important aspects.

For schemes of national significance we now propose that Parliament should have a role earlier in the procedure; issues of policy and principle would be

considered by Parliament separately and in advance of public inquiries. This change will enable Parliament to debate and establish the principle of the very biggest schemes so that the subsequent public inquiry would be limited to considerations of more local and detailed aspects for which it is better suited. We see this as a more satisfactory arrangement. If Parliament does not like the scheme in principle neither promoters nor objectors would be put to the expense of a public inquiry. Moreover, public inquiries into schemes of national significance undertaken before the principle has been settled could become unmanageable and extremely long. Finally we were persuaded by the argument of some consultees that the rejection of a project by Parliament after a public inquiry might serve to undermine the public inquiry system.

Parliamentary consideration would take the form of a debate on a resolution moved by the Government in both Houses. Parliament would, of course, require sufficient information to make a decision. We expect that the draft order, including an assessment of the impact on the environment, would be available before a debate took place. This would provide the basis for justifying the project in broad terms.

Secondly, the Government have concluded that the proposal for local authorities to deal with a first tier of schemes of essentially local significance should be dropped. These schemes would instead be decided by Ministers or be delegated to persons appointed by the Secretary of State. Only a small number of respondents to the consultation document expressed enthusiasm for this proposal and we consider that too few schemes would be suitable for decisions by local authorities to warrant establishing a separate procedure to handle them.

The proposal to allow safety to be one of the factors in determining whether footpaths and bridleways should be stopped up or diverted—paragraphs 37 to 40 of the consultation document—will, in the light of the responses, be limited in the Bill to rights of way crossing railways.

The recommendation that other works projects which require a private Bill should also be dealt with by orders has been well received. We are still considering ways in which this might best be achieved, but we agree in principle that they should be dealt with outside Parliament.

The Government will continue to consult those directly affected by these proposals as detailed procedures are worked up. They are also in contact with a range of environmental and other interests who will wish to express views on these matters.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current rate of unemployment in *(a)* the Cambridgeshire travel-to-work-area, *(b)* the Eastern region and *(c)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jackson: Only unadjusted unemployment figures are available down to travel-to-work-areas. In April 1991, the latest available date, the unadjusted unemployment rate was 3·7 per cent. in the Cambridge travel-to-work-area, 5·7 per cent. in the East Anglia region and 7·7 per cent. in the United Kingdom.

Careers Service

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the outcome of consultations between his Department and Berkshire county council with regard to the future of the careers service in Berkshire.

Mr. Jackson: My Department has received a response from the education committee of Berkshire county council to my consultation paper on the future of the careers service. I welcome the response. It is being considered prior to any decision being taken on the future of the careers service.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress his Department has made in its consultation with local education authorities on the future of the careers service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department has received a very high response from local education authorities to the consultation on the future of the careers service. All responses are being considered.

Job Clubs

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the job club provisions in the area covered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise as at 1 April.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment Measures, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on how much money his Department has contributed to retraining, training and employment schemes and job clubs and all other projects to reduce unemployment in Waveney in each of the past 10 years; and what his forward plans are for the next three years.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, in the last 10 years the Employment Department has provided a range of opportunities to assist the unemployed in the Waveney area, including youth training, community programme, employment training, advisory services to jobseekers and job clubs. Although, because of changes to the content and collation of statistics, comparable figures are not available for previous years, in the last two financial years, 1989-90 and 1990-91, my Department has allocated a total of £842,735 million to the east midlands and eastern region to assist training and unemployment measures.

The Government are determined to ensure that unemployed people have the best possible advice and support to help them to find jobs and to provide special help where it is needed. On training, this year Government are spending more than two and half times in real terms the amount spent in 1978-79.

In the future training and enterprise provision will be delivered by the training and enterprise councils. Norfolk

and Waveney TEC has been allocated a budget of £20 million in 1991-92 to enable it to plan and deliver training and enterprise provision in its area. The TEC will be paying particular attention to the needs of the unemployed.

Employment service offices in Waveney offer a full range of programmes and services to help unemployed people back to work, including advisory interviews, job club, job interview guarantee, travel to interview scheme, Restart courses and jobsearch seminars. The employment service Norfolk and Suffolk area office has a programme budget of £549,400 in 1991-92.

DEFENCE

Cluster Bombs

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of bombs dropped by United Kingdom forces in the Gulf conflict were cluster bombs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: About 7 per cent.

Nuclear Weapons (Transport)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to commission a study into the transportation of nuclear weapons through urban areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No; I am fully satisfied with our arrangements for the transport of nuclear weapons.

Procurement Contractors

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of facilities of United Kingdom-based defence procurement contractors paid £5 million or more for equipment by the Ministry of Defence in 1988-89.

Mr. Alan Clark: This information is a matter for the companies concerned.

Missile Technology Control Regime

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reassessment he has made of the work of *(a)* the co-ordinating committee on export controls or *(b)* the missile technology control regime following the conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Gulf conflict has underlined the importance of the work of the missile technology control regime in preventing the proliferation of ballistic missiles. As to the co-ordinating committee for multinational export controls, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 28 March 1991, at column *571*.

Sea King Helicopters

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the possibility of chartering civil aircraft to transport Sea King helicopters to Bangladesh.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RFA Fort Grange was considered by the Overseas Development Administration to represent the most cost-effective way of deploying and operating RN Sea King helicopters in aid of Bangladesh. The Fort Grange will provide a highly flexible operating base for both the Sea Kings and the six Royal Marine rigid raider boats which she is also carrying.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the "Options for Change" study will have any further effects on the RAF beyond those announced on 10 May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Arms Transfer

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report*, column *293*, whether he supports the inclusion of non-lethal defence equipment on a United Nations arms transfer register.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall consider this question in the light of any relevant recommendations by the United Nations expert study group when its report to the Secretary General is circulated.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to place in the Library a declassified copy of the report by the United Nations experts study group on measures to promote arms transfer transparency.

Mr. Alan Clark: When the Secretary General circulates the report I will be happy to place a copy in the Library.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has re-assessed the inspection and verification procedures of the non-proliferation treaty following the conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The need to strengthen the NPT regime is kept under contant review.

Overseas Development Agency

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money he has charged the Overseas Development Agency for the use of military resources in relief operations in *(a)* Turkey and *(b)* northern Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Charges have not yet been made, but the latest estimate for the cost to date of military assistance to the ODA is around £5 million. It is not possible to apportion costs between Turkey and northern Iraq.

RAF Squadrons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proposals he has to provide alternative postings within the Ministry of Defence to personnel from Nos. 16, 15, 92 and 20 Squadrons; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals he has to offer early retirement or voluntary redundancy packages to personnel from Nos. 16, 15, 19, 92 and 20 Squadrons; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he envisages having to compel any of the personnel of Nos. 16, 15, 19, 92 and 20 Squadrons to become redundant; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what discussions he has with local housing authorities about the future housing requirements of personnel from Nos. 16, 15, 19, 92 and 20 Squadrons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to make any of the personnel of Nos. 15, 16, 19, 20 or 92 Squadrons redundant, nor to offer them special terms for premature voluntary release. Squadron personnel will be posted to other units in the normal way. There is no need to hold discussions with local authorities about the future housing requirements of these personnel.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cambodia

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any planning for the deployment of a United Nations military force in Cambodia has taken place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We understand that the United Nations secretariat has been working on preliminary arrangements for the implementation of all the provisions of the draft comprehensive settlement document, including those relating to the military aspects.

Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Ishtiaq Ahmed, date of birth 1 January 1974, reference IMM/A4162, applied to the post in Islamabad for entry clearance to the United Kingdom; and when a decision is to be taken on his application.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In accordance with the guidelines on the handling of representations by Members of Parliament in immigration cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the question to the correspondence unit of the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Member will receive a reply from the unit as soon as possible.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 and 14 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council took place in Brussels on 13 and 14 May. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council agreed on a 60 million ecu package of emergency assistance to help those suffering in Bangladesh. The aid will be financed by bilateral contributions from member states.

At the request of the United Kingdom, the Council discussed proposals for strengthening EC-Turkey relations. It instructed the Committee of Permanent Representatives to examine the proposals in more detail and to report to the Foreign Affairs Council in July.

The Council discussed the situation in Yugoslavia. It decided that the visit by the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and the President of the Commission, which was agreed by the informal European Council in Luxembourg, should take place soon.

After a brief discussion by the Council, the Commission agreed to continue funding for the international fund for Ireland.

EC and EFTA Ministers met on 13 May to review progress in the negotiations for a European economic area, which will extend the single market to the EFTA countries. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry represented the United Kingdom. Substantial progress was made on the outstanding issues and EC and EFTA Ministers confirmed their commitment to conclude the negotiations before the summer. They agreed a comprehensive joint declaration setting out the main elements of the European economic area. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

The ninth EC-Israel co-operation council on 14 May reviewed economic co-operation between the European Community and Israel. EC Ministers raised the appointment of a Commission representative in the occupied territories and the question of EC participation in a peace conference.

Political Union

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the inter-governmental conference on political union on 13 and 14 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I attended the ministerial meeting of the inter-governmental conference on political union on 13 and 14 May. The meeting discussed presidency proposals on social policy, cohesion and European citizenship.

In discussion on social policy my right hon. Friend stressed that in the United Kingdom's view the existing treaty struck a just balance between the scope for Community action and the diversity of national practices and customs and that we saw no need for any change.

Spain, supported by other southern member states, argued that further measures to promote cohesion were necessary as the Community embarked on a new stage of political and economic integration. We, together with other northern member states, took the view that the IGC was not an appropriate forum to open a discussion on financial and budgetary issues, which would be raised in the context of next year's review of Community finances.

In the discussion on citizenship, many member states expressed the view that any new text should go no further on rights of free movement and residence than existing legal provisions. We made it clear that there should be no question of any concept of European citizenship cutting across member states' own nationality legislation.

Discussion of these and other aspects of the inter-governmental conference on political union will continue at future meetings of special representatives and Ministers. A further ministerial session will be held on 17-18 June. The inter-governmental conference will be on the agenda of the European Council to be held on 28 and 29 June.

Indo-Chinese Refugees

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the fourth meeting of the steering committee set up by the 1989 international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The fourth meeting of the steering committee created by the international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees met in Geneva on 30 April and 1 May. The joint United Kingdom and Hong Kong delegation drew attention to the worsening situation in the colony caused by a sharp increase in the number of Vietnamese migrants arriving in Hong Kong, coupled with a low number of departures. Copies of the final statement are being placed in the Library of the House. The statement reaffirms the strong commitment of participants to implement the comprehensive plan of action of June 1989 in its entirety, and in particular that non-refugees are not eligible for resettlement and must return to their country of origin. The British Government fully support the Hong Kong Government's efforts to resolve this intractable problem through the full and balanced implementation of the comprehensive plan of action. The British Government intend to consult urgently with the principal countries concerned over alternative and additional measures for accelerating the return of non-refugees to the country of origin, which remains crucial if an effective and durable solution to the problem is to be found.

SCOTLAND

GPs' Contracts

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the higher and lower targets for primary immunisation, pre-school booster immunisation and cervical cytology set in the contract for general medical practitioners which came into force on 1 April 1990; what percentage of general medical practitioners have *(a)* now achieved and *(b)* not achieved these targets; what were the comparable figures in March 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The higher target for primary immunisation—that is, of children aged two and under—and for pre-school booster for children aged five and under is 90 per cent; and the lower target for these two categories is 70 per cent. The higher target for cervical cytology is 80 per cent., and the lower 50 per cent.

The percentages of general medical practitioners reaching target levels as at 1 October 1990, in comparison with the position as at 1 April 1990, are shown in the table. The figures show that considerable progress has been made since the new GP contract was introduced on 1 April 1990 and that the incentives provided by the Government under the contract are indeed producing results.

General Medical Practitioner Target Achievement Levels
SCOTLAND: Percentage of GMPs Reaching the Target Levels

Target Category and Target Levels Achieved	*1 April 1990*	*1 October 1990*
Primary Immunisation		
90%-100%	64·0	73·4
70%-<90%	29·6	23·4
<70%	6·4	3·2
Pre-School Booster		
90%-100%	41·6	58·4
70%-<90%	29·0	17·8
<70%	29·5	23·9
Cervical Cytology		
80%-100%	45·7	61·2
50%-<80%	45·5	34·4
<50%	8·8	4·4

Note: Cervical cytology figures exclude Greater Glasgow Health Board, which has a variation on the standard targets payments system in operation.

Public Libraries

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to allocate resources towards the promotion of public library services for blind and partially sighted people; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The allocation of resources to public library services is not a matter for the Secretary of State, but for individual local authorities—usually the district and islands councils, but Highland, Borders and Dumfries and Galloway regional councils in their respective areas—which have a statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area.

Right to Buy

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been commissioned into the effects of the right-to-buy legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since the right-to-buy legislation was introduced in 1980, the Scottish Office has commissioned three research projects into its effects. The first, "Council House Sales in Scotland", was published in 1985 and is available in the Library. The other two projects, "The Right to Buy—Survey of Tenants" and "The Right to Buy—Survey of Purchasers", are still in progress and will be published in due course. Other agencies, including Scottish Homes, have also commissioned research projects about aspects of the right to buy.

Council Housing

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the percentage of council housing stock relative to the total housing stock, including private and rental, for each district council.

Mr. Lang: The latest available information, which relates to 31 March 1989, is set out in the table.

Council housing as a percentage of total stock at 31 March 1989

Area	*Local authority percentage*
SCOTLAND	38·4
Borders	
Berwickshire	27·7
Ettrick and Lauderdale	26·5
Roxburgh	33·2
Tweeddale	21·2

Area	Local authority percentage
Central	
Clackmannan	45·2
Falkirk	49·9
Stirling	36·9
Dumfries and Galloway	
Annandale and Eskdale	31·4
Nithsdale	30·6
Stewartry	22·0
Wigtown	33·6
Fife	
Dunfermline	39·4
Kirkcaldy	37·4
North East Fife	23·5
Grampian	
Aberdeen	38·3
Banff and Buchan	33·5
Gordon	18·8
Kincardine and Deeside	17·8
Moray	29·0
Highland	
Badenoch and Strathspey	19·3
Caithness	34·1
Inverness	26·9
Lochaber	35·7
Nairn	25·3
Ross and Cromarty	30·4
Skye and Lochalsh	15·0
Sutherland	25·7
Lothian	
East Lothian	40·4
Edinburgh	24·0
Midlothian	35·8
West Lothian	35·7
Strathclyde	
Argyll and Bute	24·8
Bearsden and Milngavie	11·5
Clydesbank	56·9
Clydesdale	43·1
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	18·6
Cumnock and Doon Valley	54·5
Cunninghame	36·8
Dumbarton	38·9
East Kilbride	5·1
Eastwood	7·9
Glasgow	52·9
Hamilton	52·0
Inverclyde	46·5
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	48·7
Kyle and Carrick	37·8
Monklands	72·8
Motherwell	71·2
Renfrew	43·2
Strathkelvin	33·9
Tayside	
Angus	31·5
Dundee	47·6
Perth and Kinross	27·3
Island Councils	
Orkney Islands	17·4
Shetland Islands	29·2
Western Isles	18·4

Source: Valuation roll.

Bus Companies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* the numbers of buses owned, *(b)* the numbers of staff employed and *(c)* the net book value of the assets of the Scottish Bus Group subsidiary, Eastern Scottish, at the time of its sale; and what were the net proceeds from the sale.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following information relates to the position as at 22 April 1990:

(a) 391.
(b) 1,119.
(c) £6,574,000. The net assets are stated on an historical cost basis, with the exception of heritable land and buildings which were re-valued on a current use basis.

Sale prices for the subsidiaries of the Scottish Bus Group will be made public only after privatisation of all subsidiaries has been completed.

Islay

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there are any plans to designate the Isle of Islay an environmentally sensitive area; what consultations are under way to review the present arrangements; what consultations are under way or planned by the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and other interested parties; when he expects consultations to conclude; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has no plans to designate the Isle of Islay as an environmentally sensitive area. He is, however, currently reviewing the present arrangements for such areas and will, if necessary, honour his statutory obligation to consult the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland on any proposal to change these arrangements flowing from the review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the maximum net weekly incomes that would qualify for a local tax rebate in each property band in every local authority in Scotland if the exemplifications recently published by him applied with 100 per cent. rebates of those on income support and a 15 per cent. taper applied for *(a)* a married couple with two children under 11 years, *(b)* a married couple with no children and *(c)* a pensioner couple aged 60 to 74 years.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

Estimates of rebates under the council tax cannot be provided, since the detailed arrangements have yet to be determined.

Social Work (Scotland) Act

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will state the number of voluntary and caring organisations which have received reductions in Scottish Office financial assistance in 1991-92, given under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 together with the amount of such reductions and the amount for each organisation affected;

(2) if he will state the numbers of organisations which have received grants under the Social Work (Scotland) Act

1968 for each of the past five years; and how many organisations have been eliminated from such financial assistance during the period.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grants are made available to voluntary and other organisations under sections 9 and 10(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Grants were made to the following organisations in 1990-91:

Organisation	*Total grant paid* £
Age Concern Scotland	96,128
Association of Lanark Voluntary Organisations	21,098
Alzheimers Scotland	75,341
Annandale and Eskdale Council of Social Service	1,250
Apex Scotland	164,350
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering	30,000
Banff and Buchan Resource Information and Development Group Exchange	21,818
Badenoch and Strathspey Council of Social Services	21,897
Barra and Vatersay Council of Social Services	20,664
Berwickshire Association of Voluntary Service	11,548
Borders Federation of Councils of Voluntary Service	895
Brittle Bone Society	9,963
Broxburn/Uphall Handishop	286
Bute Community Links	17,480
Caithness Voluntary Group	22,411
Call Centre	16,200
Care in Action Scotland	18,936
Carers National Association	18,538
Childline Charitable Trust	10,000
Childline Scottish Appeal	25,000
Church of Scotland (Designated Place, Inverness)	3,350
Community Service Volunteers	17,000
Confederation of Scottish Counselling Agencies	20,000
Crossroads (Scotland)	23,856
Cruse Bereavement Care	9.975
Dementia Services Development Centre	66,372
Dial Scotland	10,373
Disability Scotland	264,474
Disablement Income Group	4,448
Disfigurement Guidance Centre	6,581
East Sutherland Council of Social Services	15,116
Ettrick and Lauderdale Council of Social Service	10,903
Gingerbread Scotland	28,061
Glasgow City Aid	6,770
Gordon Rural Area Information Network	21,963
Hamilton and East Kilbride Befriending Project	28,363
Harris Council of Social Service	15,043
Highland Federation of Councils of Social Service	3,641
Home-start Consultancy	20,000
Intermediate Treatment Resource Centre	75,137
Inverness Voluntary Organisations Group	15,149
Islay and Jura Council of Voluntary Service	25,182
Isle of Arran Council of Social Service	12,888
Kincardine and Deeside Council of Social Service	26,098
Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes Association of Voluntary Organisations	5,016
Kyle and Carrick Council of Social Service	10,852
Levenmouth Council of Social Service	2,454
Lewis Council of Social Service	29,935
Marriage Counselling Scotland	90,668
ME Association	15,115
Midlothian Council of Social Service	6,195
Mobile Projects Association Scotland	15,875
Moray Youth Project	54,000
National Children's Home	47,177
National Foster Care Association	20,925
National Institute for Social Work	8,200
National Schizophrenia Fellowship Scotland	11,178
Nithsdale Council of Voluntary Service	15,070
North and West Sutherland Council of Social Service	11,074
Penumbra	22,512
Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Service	14,533
Planning and Development Unit, Tayside	6,000
Play Matters	3,500
Plus Self Help Association	39,993
Positive Help	20,000
Quarriers/SCAFA (Borders Development)	13,010
Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	133,074
Renfrew Council on Alcohol	25,000
Richmond Fellowship	42,705
Ross and Cromarty Council of Social Service	21,308
Roxburgh Association of Voluntary Service	13,356
Samaritans	5,000
Save the Children Fund (Renton Project)	42,000
Scottish Association for the Deaf	7,356
Scottish Association of Family Conciliation Services	60,236
Scottish Association for Mental Health	104,304
Scottish Adventure Playground Association	14,800
Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters	32,112
Scottish Child and Family Alliance	58,685
Scottish Child Minding Association	40,492
Scottish Council for Single Parents	33,027
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	298,191
Scottish Home Visiting Resources and Training Unit	25,814
Scottish Pre School Play Association	92,321
Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped	31,500
Scottish Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders	150,086
Scottish Action on Dementia	500
Scottish Child Law Centre	40,790
Scottish Council on Alcohol	31,550
Scottish Down Syndrome Association	8,005
Scottish Institute of Human Relations	16,010
Scottish Play Council	2,000
Scottish Refugee Council	4,583
Scottish Spina Bifida Association	14,187
Scottish Spinal Cord Injury Association	13,869
Scottish Training Advice Service	28,500
Scottish Womens Aid	111,520
Scottish Council for Single Homeless	8,078
Sense in Scotland	54,684
Shetland Council of Social Service	22,862
Skye and Lochalsh Council of Social Service	20,038
Speyside and District Council of Social Service	18,071
Stepping Stones	26,817
Stewartry Council for Voluntary Service	17,802
Still Birth and Neo-natal Death Society	2,750
Stirling Council of Social Service	18,266
Student Community Action Scotland Development Unit	15,469
The Princes Trust	8,000
Tweeddale Association of Voluntary Service	9,437
Uist Council of Social Service	20,668
University of Glasgow	21,300
University of Stirling	5,624
Volunteer Development Scotland	60,031
Visualise	10,000
Victim Support Scotland	397,937
Voluntary Association of Nairn Groups	11,585
Voluntary Services Orkney	28,940
West Lothian Council of Social Service	17,890
West Lothian Voluntary Council for Disabled People	28,574
Who Cares? Scotland	30,769
Wigtown Council for Voluntary Service	13,418

Note: A number of organisations received more than one grant.

The following seven organisations will receive a lower level of grant in 1991-92:

Organisation	*Grant paid in 1990-91 (£)*	*Grant likely to be paid in 1991-92 (£)*
Section 9 grants		
Age Concern (Scotland)	47,700	45,100
Marriage Counselling (Scotland)	13,400	11,000
Victim Support (Scotland)	22,100	20,600

Organisation	Grant paid in 1990-91 (£)	Grant likely to be paid in 1991-92 (£)
Section 10(1) grants		
SENSE	36,050	31,250
Brittle Bone Society	9,950	5,200
Disfigurement Guidance Centre	6,600	3,150
Scottish Spina Bifida Association	14,200	10,200

In addition, grants to 10 organisations were not renewed in 1991-92. Two section 9 grants were not renewed. These grants are based on three-year blocks of funding and are subject to renewal only in exceptional circumstances. Of the eight section 10(1) grants which were not renewed, five were for time-limited projects which had come to an end. In the other cases, one organisation did not submit an application for grant in 1991-92, one organisation was no longer representative following a reduction in membership and one organisation had largely completed the development work for which it was being funded.

The numbers of grants given to organisations, and grant which ceased, in each of the past five years are as follows:

Year	Number of grants	Number of grants which ceased
Section 9 grants		
1986-87	15	0
1987-88	18	0
1988-89	17	0
1989-90	21	0
1990-91	19	4
Section 10(1) grants		
1986-87	144	12
1987-88	136	21
1988-89	134	24
1989-90	122	33
1990-91	134	11

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Salmon

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the causes of the decline in rod-caught salmon during the 1990 season.

Mr. Curry: Only provisional rod data for 1990 are so far available. I am aware of reports that in some cases rod catches were lower than in previous years. The distribution and variation in catches is being analysed by scientists in the Fisheries Departments and by the National Rivers Authority. It is too early to draw firm conclusions. Year on year fluctuations in catches of migratory fish are normal and can be the result of a number of factors, including low water levels due to drought and higher than normal levels of natural mortality. It is not yet known whether there are any other abnormal factors in relation to the 1990 catches.

Tuberculosis

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether his Ministry has carried out post mortems on rats found on farms where a herd outbreak of tuberculosis occurred to establish whether the rats themselves were carriers of the disease; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about the work his Ministry is carrying out into investigating the possibility that rats might be vectors of tuberculosis, passing the disease on to cattle;

(3) if he will list all the mammals which have been investigated by his Ministry as possible vectors of tuberculosis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Rats are not examined as part of an investigation into a cattle herd breakdown. Past studies have looked at the possibility of rats and other wildlife being involved in the transmission of tuberculosis to cattle. This work was reviewed by Professor Dunnett in his report on badgers and bovine tuberculosis in 1986. No actual lesions have been revealed, other than in deer, and it has been concluded that where visible lesions are absent infected animals are not likely to be infectious. Appendix 8 of Professor Dunnett's report lists those species examined and information on wildlife examined is published annually in the reports on bovine tuberculosis in Badgers which are available in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC (Finance Ministers)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest informal meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Ministers.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Community met informally on 10 to 12 May. The Governor of the Bank of England and I represented the United Kingdom.

Discussion of economic and monetary union focused on the content of stage 2 and the transition to stage 3. Differing views emerged on a number of issues and, in particular, the date for the establishment of a European system of central banks.

I made it clear that the United Kingdom was not prepared to commit itself to moving to stage 3 without a further vote by the House of Commons in the future. There was some suggestion that it might be possible to meet the United Kingdom's concern on this point. I took the view that this was a constructive step in our direction but that the IGC was still at an early stage in negotiations and that many issues, including the content of stage 2, would have to be resolved before this question could be addressed in detail.

A proposal from the Presidency setting out frameworks for the approximation of VAT and excise duties in the Community was also discussed. I argued that the approximation of VAT rates at Community level was not necessary for the removal of fiscal frontiers in the single market and I also emphasised the importance to the United Kingdom of continuing to apply our existing zero rates. In the discussion of excise duties, I argued for high minimum duty rates or effective restrictions to take account of the important health and social concerns attached to alcohol and tobacco. In both discussions other Ministers also expressed their different concerns and no agreements were reached.

The President of the Commission gave an account of his approach towards future financing issues in the Community over lunch. In a brief discussion of aid for Bangladesh, I urged that aid should be given through national channels and through the Community's existing budgetary resources.

Interest Rates

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing, for each quarter from the first quarter of 1977 to the first quarter of 1991 inclusive, the total United Kingdom short-term interest rate, using *(a)* the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments and *(b)* the retail prices index as the deflator.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested is in the following table:

		Percentage increase on a year earlier	
		3 month interbank rate less RPI excluding mortgage interest payments	*3 month interbank rate less RPI*
1977			
	Q1	−3·8	−3·9
	Q2	−8·0	−8·0
	Q3	−8·3	−8·3
	Q4	−6·9	−6·5
1978			
	Q1	−3·3	−2·6
	Q2	0·6	1·2
	Q3	1·5	1·6
	Q4	3·5	3·3
1979			
	Q1	3·7	2·8
	Q2	2·5	1·4
	Q3	−0·9	−1·6
	Q4	−0·7	−1·3
1980			
	Q1	−0·3	−1·2
	Q2	−2·8	−3·6
	Q3	0·7	−0·2
	Q4	1·2	0·2
1981			
	Q1	0·6	0·6
	Q2	0·2	0·7
	Q3	2·2	2·7
	Q4	3·1	3·3
1982			
	Q1	3·3	2·9
	Q2	4·0	3·6
	Q3	3·5	3·2
	Q4	2·9	3·5
1983			
	Q1	4·6	5·9
	Q2	5·3	6·1
	Q3	4·6	5·0
	Q4	4·3	4·1
1984			
	Q1	4·6	3·9
	Q2	4·1	3·9
	Q3	6·7	6·2
	Q4	5·8	5·1
1985			
	Q1	7·8	7·1
	Q2	7·0	5·3
	Q3	6·0	5·1
	Q4	6·1	5·8
1986			
	Q1	7·6	7·2
	Q2	6·7	7·2
	Q3	6·5	7·2
	Q4	7·6	7·6
1987			
	Q1	6·7	6·4
	Q2	5·4	4·8
	Q3	6·0	5·3
	Q4	5·0	4·9
1988			
	Q1	5·1	5·4
	Q2	3·8	4·0
	Q3	5·9	5·6
	Q4	7·0	5·6
1989			
	Q1	7·1	5·0
	Q2	7·1	4·9
	Q3	7·7	5·8
	Q4	8·5	7·0
1990			
	Q1	8·5	6·9
	Q2	6·5	4·9
	Q3	5·5	4·1
	Q4	4·2	3·5
1991			
	Q1	4·3	4·1

Interbank Rates

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing, for each month from January 1986 to the present *(a)* the average three-month interbank rate, *(b)* the average three-month interbank rate in real terms, using the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments as the deflator and *(c)* the percentage growth in bank and building society lending over the same month in the previous year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested is in the following table:

	Average 3 month interbank rate	Average 3 month interbank rate less RPI excluding mips	Percentage growth in bank and building society lending over same month in previous year
1986			
January	12·8	7·6	16·2
February	12·7	7·5	17·3
March	11·7	7·4	16·6
April	10·5	6·8	16·5
May	10·2	6·9	16·5
June	9·8	6·2	17·2
July	10·0	6·4	17·8
August	9·8	6·2	18·4
September	10·1	6·6	18·1
October	11·0	7·5	18·8
November	11·2	7·6	19·6
December	11·4	7·6	20·2
1987			
January	11·1	7·2	20·5
February	10·9	6·9	19·8
March	10·0	5·9	19·1
April	9·8	6·0	19·6
May	8·8	4·8	19·5
June	8·9	5·2	19·3
July	9·2	5·3	19·6
August	10·0	6·1	18·9
September	10·2	6·4	20·1
October	10·0	5·9	19·3
November	9·0	4·8	18·9
December	8·8	4·7	19·1
1988			
January	9·0	5·1	20·1
February	9·3	5·5	20·0
March	8·9	4·9	20·9
April	8·3	3·9	21·9
May	8·0	3·5	22·3
June	8·9	4·0	22·9
July	10·6	5·3	23·6
August	11·4	6·1	24·1
September	12·2	6·6	24·3
October	12·0	6·6	24·7
November	12·3	6·9	24·6
December	13·1	7·6	24·6
1989			
January	13·1	7·2	24·5
February	13·0	6·9	24·3
March	13·1	7·0	24·3
April	13·1	6·8	23·5
May	13·1	6·7	23·3
June	14·2	7·8	22·5
July	13·9	7·7	21·6
August	13·9	7·7	21·9
September	14·0	7·8	22·1
October	15·0	8·4	21·4
November	15·1	8·5	20·9
December	15·1	8·5	21·2
1990			
January	15·2	8·5	20·4
February	15·1	8·4	20·7
March	15·3	8·5	20·4
April	15·2	6·8	19·7
May	15·2	6·5	19·3
June	15·0	6·3	18·7
July	14·9	6·1	17·7
August	15·0	5·4	16·7
September	14·9	4·9	15·7
October	14·0	4·1	15·5
November	13·6	4·1	15·4
December	13·8	4·4	13·8
1991			
January	14·0	5·0	13·1
February	13·3	4·3	12·4
March	12·4	3·7	11·1

Tobacco Taxation

Sir David Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made towards the harmonisation of tobacco taxation within the European Community; and what effect this will have on the current level of tobacco taxation in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 16 May 1991]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway).

There has been no agreement on tobacco tax rates and the Government view remains that centrally imposed tax harmonisation is unnecessary for completion of the single market. The United Kingdom remains free to set its own duty rates.

Civil Research and Development

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his reply of 8 May, *Official Report*, column *461*, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan, what are the comparable figures of per capita spending on civil research and development in 1989 for Canada, Belgium, France, Germany, Japan and Sweden.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 16 May 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Relevant information currently available for these countries relating to the years 1984 to 1990 is published in table 6 of the OECD publication "Main Science and Technology Indicators 1990(2)", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 May 1991

TRANSPORT

East-West Trunk Route

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the terms of reference under which Acer Consultants Ltd. has been appointed to consider the alignment of an east-west trunk route for the A5 to M11 (Stansted) section.

Mr. Chope: I have placed a copy of the consultant's brief in the Library today.

Cars (Carbon Canisters)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require the fitting of large carbon canisters to cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government are keen to ensure that there is a substantial reduction in evaporative emissions from petrol engined cars. From the end of next year all new cars will have to be fitted with carbon canisters as standard equipment to achieve this reduction. We are working on further measures which will probably involve minimising evaporative emissions while cars are running or being refuelled. The fitting of larger carbon canisters to cars is one technical means of achieving this. We also hope that the European Commission will soon make long-overdue proposals to minimise evaporative emissions in the petrol distribution network.

Seat Belts

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been central Government expenditure on publicising *(a)* the law requiring children in the back of cars to wear seat belts where fitted and *(b)* changes in the law about adults wearing seat belts when rear seat passengers.

Mr. Chope: Government expenditure to date on publicising the law requiring children in the back of cars to wear seat belts, where fitted, has been £748,000. We intend to mount a campaign to publicise the proposed changes in the law about adults wearing seat belts when rear seat passengers, subject to the outcome of debate on legislation currently before Parliament. But to date no expenditure on publicity has been incurred.

Bus Companies

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of registered bus companies for each year for 1979 to 1990.

Mr. Freeman: The approximate numbers of bus and coach companies are as follows:

December	
1979	5,600
1980	5,600
1981	5,500
1982	5,600
1983	6,000
1984	5,800
March	
1986	5,800
1987	5,900
1988	5,900
1989	6,000
1990	6,200

These figures are based on the total number of PSV operators' licences issued by the traffic area offices. There is considerable uncertainty about the number of smaller operators because of the high rate at which such operators enter and leave the industry.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the final report from W. S. Atkins on the evaluation of the schemes for the high-speed rail link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that W. S. Atkins expects to deliver its final report to British Rail shortly, and that British Rail will then send copies to us.

Geomagnetism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the value of the work done for his Department on *(a)* geomagnetism and *(b)* his assessment of the future importance of geomagnetism studies to his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on magnetic variation is used in the preparation of charts for marine and civil aviation use. The Hydrographer of the Navy is responsible for providing information about magnetic variation for marine navigation purposes and the Civil Aviation Authority undertakes in conjunction with Ordnance Survey the production of civil aviation charts. To this end the CAA requires only a forecast of the general trend of magnetic variation 18 months ahead. No work has been done on geomagnetism for the Department of Transport, as geomagnetic studies are not of importance to the Department other than to the extent outlined.

Pedestrians (Fatal Injuries)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an age breakdown of pedestrians fatally injured in road accidents for each year since 1980.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Pedestrians killed in road accidents by age: Great Britain: 1980-90[1]

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
0-4	66	74	79	71	69	57	58	57	71	60	
5-9	128	149	110	160	133	126	99	94	113	97	
10-14	104	95	120	129	131	122	103	94	83	80	
All (0-14)	298	318	309	360	333	305	260	245	267	237	215
15-19	128	125	128	133	107	116	126	96	89	95	
20-29	117	129	156	148	157	140	182	143	160	167	
30-39	101	98	106	111	113	112	110	110	108	109	
40-49	120	105	126	109	105	105	112	122	122	117	
50-59	169	148	145	149	152	140	148	130	125	126	
All (15-59)	635	605	661	650	634	613	678	601	604	614	583
60-69	278	246	239	244	210	239	220	212	209	200	
70+	727	701	648	652	669	630	682	641	656	642	
All (60+)	1,005	947	887	896	879	869	902	853	865	842	822
All ages[2]	1,941	1,874	1,869	1,914	1,868	1,789	1,841	1,703	1,753	1,706	1,636

[1]Figures for 1990 are provisional. A more detailed breakdown is not available.
[2]Including age not reported.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pedestrians were fatally injured in road accidents for the years: 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Pedestrians killed in road accidents: Great Britain

Year	Number
1970	2,925
1975	2,344
1980	1,941
1985	1,789
[1]1990	1,636

[1] Figures for 1990 are provisional.

Speed Limiters

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered a requirement to fit speed limiters to motor cars; and whether his Department will make an assessment of the effects of fitting speed limiters to all cars in respect of *(a)* emissions of air pollutants and *(b)* road safety.

Mr. Chope: Our top priority has been to require coaches and HGVs to be fitted with speed limiters. There are no plans to extend this requirement to cars.

Flight Training

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to bring in regulations to allow flight training to take place other than at United Kingdom licensed airfields; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation rests with the Civil Aviation Authority. I understand that the CAA has no immediate plans to propose regulatory changes which allow flight training to take place other than at United Kingdom licensed airfields. The CAA has, however, recently received a request from the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association that this requirement be relaxed in the case of certain smaller aerodromes operating light aircraft training types. This request is being examined.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of implementing the Civil Aviation Authority's regulations concerning fire cover for flight training; if there are any plans to amend the regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Currently the need to provide adequate rescue and fire fighting facilities is part of the Civil Aviation Authority's requirement for the issue of an aerodrome licence. Fire cover is related to the proposed aerodrome usage and it is, therefore, not possible to isolate the cost element associated solely with flight training.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of fire have been reported at aerodromes licensed for the purpose of flight training; how many fatalities have occurred in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The issue by the Civil Aviation Authority of an aerodrome licence permits various activities including flight training. I understand that the authority has information only on incidents attended by the rescue and fire-fighting services and that these are not necessarily incidents where fire has been reported. The information is therefore not available in the format requested.

Train Deaths

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the composition, independence and time constraints authorised for Her Majesty's railway inspectorate's inquiry into the pattern of falls from moving trains; and when they are due to report.

Mr. Roger Freeman: The Health and Safety Executive's investigation into falls from moving trains, which the railway inspectorate will be leading, will also involve the scientific, technological and statistical sections of the executive. The statutory functions of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive guarantees the independence of the investigation. This will be a complex and detailed investigation, but I hope very much that the report will be completed by the end of the year.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the correlation in his illustrative tables on the council tax between the percentage over standard spending assessment and the average value of homes in the district giving the increase in band D property for each 10 per cent. increase in SSA depending on whether the average value home is in band A, B, C or D;

(2) further to his answer on 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will assess the increase in council tax in each band for each 1 per cent. increased spending over standard spending assessment for a council most of whose properties are in *(a)* band A, *(b)* band B, *(c)* band C and *(d)* band D;

(3) further to his answer on 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will give the council tax for band B property in the illustrated figures for a standard level of service and the variations in the figures for bands A, B, and G in areas in which the majority of properties in a district are in *(a)* band A, *(b)* band B, *(c)* bands C and D and *(d)* band D;

(4) further to his answer on 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will list the size of increase in council tax for each percentage point of increased spending above the standard spending assessment, up to 40 per cent. above SSA, for Grimsby; and what would be the figures if the average value of households in Grimsby were in (i) band A, (ii) band B, (iii) band C or (iv) band D of the tables published to illustrate his proposals;

(5) what is the effect on the level of the proposed council tax of the average value of properties in the district; and if he will give illustrative examples of the differences in level of tax, with all other factors held constant, where the majority of houses in a district are *(a)* in band A, *(b)* in band B, *(c)* in band C, *(d)* in band D, *(e)* in band E, *(f)* in band F and *(g)* in band G.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 May *Official Report*, column *548*.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each county *(a)* the total revenue support grant distributed to district councils in that county plus grants distributed to the relevant county council, *(b)* on a per head basis, *(c)* those figures for the previous year and *(d)* the percentage difference between the figures for each year and ranked according to the levels of grant per head.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* The following information is available.

Authority	*Revenue support grant 1991-92 £ million*	*Revenue support grant 1991-92 £/head*	*Revenue support grant 1990-91 £ million*	*Revenue support grant 1990-91 £/head*	*Percentage difference on total RSG*	*Percentage difference on £/head*
Cleveland	150·2	367·2	145·3	353·4	3·4	3·9
Bedfordshire	98·6	254·0	92·8	235·4	6·4	7·9
Lancashire	256·2	246·3	252·3	240·8	1·5	2·3
Leicestershire	156·5	242·8	155·4	238·4	0·7	1·8
Humberside	153·0	235·2	158·0	242·1	−3·2	−2·9
Buckinghamshire	99·7	215·2	97·3	207·2	2·4	3·9
Berkshire	111·2	201·4	115·8	209·6	−3·9	−3·9
Northamptonshire	85·2	198·9	94·7	224·1	−10·1	−11·2
Nottinghamshire	147·1	193·7	153·5	201·8	−4·2	−4·0
Kent	217·9	189·9	220·1	192·0	−1·0	−1·1
Isle of Wight	17·6	180·7	15·8	160·5	10·9	12·6
Hertfordshire	130·8	179·5	131·4	178·6	−0·5	0·5
Cornwall	61·5	174·0	66·4	189·4	−7·4	−8·1
Durham	78·2	173·4	82·2	180·3	−4·9	−3·8
Shropshire	51·9	169·8	61·7	204·2	−15·9	−16·8
Northumberland	38·3	166·8	41·9	182·7	−8·4	−8·7
Lincolnshire	72·2	161·0	79·0	174·5	−8·5	−7·8
Essex	185·7	160·0	197·5	169·1	−6·0	−5·4
Cambridgeshire	77·0	159·2	89·8	188·1	−14·2	−15·4
Cumbria	58·9	157·9	60·2	157·0	−2·2	0·5
Cheshire	110·4	154·8	125·9	175·5	−12·3	−11·8
Hampshire	175·3	150·3	193·1	164·7	−9·2	−8·7
East Sussex	75·3	141·0	72·4	134·0	4·0	5·3
Somerset	48·9	139·7	53·3	151·8	−8·2	−8·0
Suffolk	64·4	137·4	69·4	147·7	−7·2	−7·0
Oxfordshire	54·1	134·3	57·6	141·0	−6·0	−4·8
Avon	95·4	133·8	111·8	157·1	−14·6	−14·8
Devon	102·1	131·6	123·3	161·3	−17·2	−18·4
Staffordshire	100·2	128·1	115·7	147·0	−13·4	−12·9
Wiltshire	54·1	127·9	64·3	153·2	−15·8	−16·5
Gloucestershire	48·5	121·6	58·3	146·4	−16·8	−16·9
North Yorkshire	64·6	120·2	72·3	134·5	−10·7	−10·6
Derbyshire	85·0	119·9	100·3	140·5	−15·3	−14·7
Norfolk	64·8	113·0	75·6	131·7	−14·4	−14·2
Hereford and Worcester	56·4	111·1	70·7	139·9	−20·3	−20·6
Surrey	77·9	102·2	83·3	106·5	−6·5	−4·1
Warwickshire	37·0	101·4	48·0	131·4	−22·9	−22·8
West Sussex	50·3	93·6	55·0	100·6	−8·6	−6·9
Dorset	30·8	61·3	46·4	92·3	−33·6	−33·6

These figures exclude specific grants paid to county councils, as specific grants for 1991-92 are not yet available. Amounts per head are shown in terms of amounts per head of relevant population for the year. Differences between columns (5) and (6) therefore reflect changes in the sum of the districts' relevant populations between 1990-91 and 1991-92. The figures are ranked according to revenue support grant per head in 1991-92.

Households

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the number of households nationally and regionally, the numbers in each type of household as defined in the family expenditure survey and the number he expects not to contribute to the council tax.

Mr. Key: Liability for the council tax will fall to the occupier of a property. It will be up to that person to decide how the bill will be shared if there are other adults in the household. It is not possible to estimate how many will contribute in this way.

The Government propose that householders on income support or equivalent levels of income will be entitled to 100 per cent. rebates under the council tax. They will make no contribution to the council tax.

The table shows the most recent estimates of the numbers of households in each region together with the percentage of one-adult—aged 18 or over—two-adult, and three or more adult households.

Region	*Total number of households (000's)*	*Percentage of households with one adult*	*with two adults*	*with three or more adults*
Northern	1,300	33	53	15
Yorks and Humberside	2,100	34	54	12
North-West	2,600	34	52	14
East Midlands	1,600	31	55	13
West Midlands	2,200	31	54	15
East Anglia	900	30	58	12
Greater London	2,600	40	48	12
Rest of South-East	4,300	29	58	13
South-West	1,900	30	58	13
ENGLAND	19,500	32	54	13

Architectural Competitions

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table listing *(a)* the architectural competitions for public buildings organised by his Department since 1979, *(b)* the names of the winning firm of architects in each case, *(c)* the names of the jury panel in each case and *(d)* which buildings were erected.

Mr. Heseltine: I am arranging for copies of this table to be placed in the Library of the House.

Poll Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the most recent guidelines given to local authorities regarding the payment of poll tax by those serving in the Gulf.

Mr. Key: My Department wrote to local authorities on 16 May with further advice on this issue. A copy of the advice is in the Library.

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been spent through derelict land grant in each of the last four years in Teesside; and which projects have been supported.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is as follows:

Derelict land grant paid in Teesside in the last four years

Grant recipient	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Cleveland County Council	184,794	410,148	37,333	35,401
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	—	146,995	368,388	34,885
Middlesbrough Borough Council	1,298,885	[1]−110,000	550,739	50,284
Langbaurgh Borough Council	50,278	165,190	166,363	243,505
Non local authority applicants	1,148,698	438,577	192,643	—
Total	2,682,655	1,050,910	1,315,466	364,075

[1] Repayment of grant

Projects in Teesside supported by derelict land grant in the last four years

Cleveland CC

Malleable Site, Stockton
Billingham Bottoms, Stockton
Union Insulation
Bolckow Road
Cargo Fleet Works, Middlesborough
Queens Park North
Colliers Site

Stockton-on-Tees BC

Bowesfield Riverside, Stockton
Teesdale West (site investigation)
Peacocks Yard
Tees Street
Station Street, Stockton
Land at 133 Yarm Road
Thorpe Thewles Garage
Station Road, Norton
Stillington Tip

Mill Street West
Elton Close/Durham Road, Stockton
Esh and Hamsteels Wagonway Site

Middlesbrough BC
Whinney Banks
Former Coburn Land
Riverside Park
Millbrooke Avenue/College Road, Brambles Farm
Land at Forty Foot Road
Central Ironmasters
St. Hildas
Balder Street

Langbaurgh BC
Warrenby Mine
Old Middlesbrough Road
Hazelgrove Chalets
Skinningrove Headlands
Jones Road, South Bank
South Skelton Mine
Kingsway Sidings
Cleveland House
Meggitts Lane
Imperial Park
Hobson Avenue
Meggitts Avenue
North Skelton Mine
Stockton Haulage, Cargo Fleet
Liverton Mines
Old Station Road, South Bank
Clay Lane Community Park
South Bank Wharf
Station Road, Redcar
Hollybush Depot
Park Street, South Skelton
Grand Hall, Brotton
Former Housing Site, Charltons
Prospect Place, Lingdale

Non local authority project
North Tees Power Station

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many inquiries from Basildon new town tenants have been received regarding the rents-to-mortgages scheme since the announcement of its introduction in autumn 1990; how many sales through rents-to-mortgages have been achieved to date; what representations he has received regarding the progress of rent-to-mortgages scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: There were more than 900 initial inquiries following the announcement of the rents-to-mortgages scheme in Basildon last autumn. Since its official launch in February there have been 180 firm applications and the first sale is expected to be completed next month. There have been no recent representations about the progress of the scheme, which is being monitored carefully.

Community Charge

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will withdraw "Community Charge Practice Note 25" as it relates to people who change addresses within one local authority charging area.

Mr. Key: My Department has ceased production of all the community charge practice notes. The issue of practice notes on the community charge is now a function of the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue the planning policy guidance note on sites for wind, tidal and other alternative energy plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 28 March, *Official Report*, columns *543-44*.

Solar Heating

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to make a condition of domestic planning consent the installation of solar panels in all new dwellings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I have no plans to advise local planning authorities to impose conditions on all residential planning permissions requiring the installation of solar panels.

Child Abuse

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many social workers with specialist training in child abuse are employed by each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Key: This information is not held centrally.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will acquire for his Department's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Buildings (Environmental Assessment)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental assessment method programme launched by the Building Research Establishment.

Mr. Yeo: The Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method—BREEAM—was developed by the BRE in association with private sector interests and launched in July 1990. It is a method by which the environmental impact of new office buildings can be assessed against defined criteria at design stage and, where appropriate, improved. The scheme is voluntary and its operation self-financing. I welcome this collaborative initiative by the Building Research Establishment and the firms associated with it.

Public Sanitary Facilities

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is given to local authorities on the cleaning up of public sanitary facilities.

Mr. Baldry: None, but they have an obligation to ensure that public sanitary conveniences, whether provided by themselves or others, are not prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

Brandon Estate, Southwark

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why the Estate Action bid by Southwark council for the Brandon estate was rejected;

(2) if he will reconsider the application of Southwark council for Estate Action funding for the Brandon estate.

Mr. Yeo: The Department did not offer Estate Action support for 1991-92 to Southwark council towards the cost of its proposed works on the Brandon estate as the application failed to satisfy the objectives of the programme. The Department would be willing to consider a new bid for this estate in a future year, but approval would depend on the quality of the proposed scheme in competition with other bids received.

Estate Action

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the criteria for awarding Estate Action funding.

Mr. Yeo: Estate Action resources are allocated on the basis of published ministerial guidelines. The detailed criteria applicable to 1992-93 will be published shortly.

Right to Buy

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 April, *Official Report*, column *227*, to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward), how much discount, in cash terms, has been granted as a result of these sales under right-to-buy legislation.

Mr. Yeo: Information on the value of discount allowed under right to buy is not separately identified. Between October 1980, when the right-to-buy scheme was introduced, and December 1990 about £14 billion was granted as discount to all purchasers of local authority dwellings in England.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the impact of the European Commission's report about quality assurance in the management of radioactive waste in the European Community on United Kingdom policy on nuclear waste.

Mr. Baldry: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the report by the European Commission entitled "Objectives, standards and criteria for radioactive waste disposal in the European Community"—EUR 12570. The report was produced by a working group on which my Department was represented. I fully agree with the European Council conclusions that the report was a good assessment of the current situation for radioactive waste disposal.

Dog Registration

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he now considers it necessary to introduce a dog registration scheme by which dog ownership is linked to the animals owned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Environmental Protection Act 1990 contains a package of measures to enforce the requirement that dogs wear a collar and identifying tag when in a public place; and to ensure that stray dogs are collected up. We remain of the view that the package provides a practical and effective solution to the problems caused by irresponsible owners and that registration would be costly, bureaucratic and ineffective.

Council Tax

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people in the North Devon district council area would benefit from reduced payments under his council tax proposals.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 15 May 1991]:* Information about the effect of the council tax on individuals is not available. The tables issued on 23 April show the effects on households of the council tax as compared with headline community charges in 1991-92.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the estimated cost of using the district valuers and their staff to undertake the valuation of properties for the proposed council tax;

(2) how many estate agents will be employed to undertake the valuation of properties for the proposed council tax; how these estate agents will be chosen; and what is his estimate of the cost of employing them.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Paragraph 2.29 of the consultation paper "A new tax for local government" set out the Government's proposals for the initial banding of properties. We are presently considering the best way of combining Valuation Office expertise and that of private sector valuers, with a view to enabling all domestic properties to be placed into seven bands by value, and the council tax to be in place by April 1993.

Housing (Southwark)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long it will take under the current housing reference system for the London borough of Southwark to receive an actual management and maintenance allowance equivalent to the target management and maintenance allowance.

Mr. Yeo: *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* Our aim is to move progressively towards a system of targeted housing revenue account subsidy allowances for management and maintenance based upon an assessment of need rather than on historic spend. This will involve a redistribution of resources between local housing authorities. The rate of progress of introducing targeted allowances will depend on annual decisions about the overall provision for allowances and will be subject to consultation with local housing authorities and their associations.

PRIME MINISTER

European Monetary Union

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the recent proposals by the President of the European Comission for a delayed consideration of entry into European monetary union.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor told the House on 24 January, we cannot accept any changes to the treaty of Rome that would bind us to move to a single currency or a single monetary policy without a separate decision by the United Kingdom Government and Parliament. The suggestion made at the informal ECOFIN on 12 May is a step in the right direction. But there remain many issues to be discussed in the economic and monetary union intergovernmental conference before a final agreement can be reached.

International Arms Transfers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will seek a debate on the United Nations on the United Nations Publication, "Topical Paper 3—Transparency in International Arms Transfers".

The Prime Minister: We are in favour of greater transparency in international arms transfers. On 8 April I proposed the establishment of a United Nations register of arms sales. We are discussing this with members of the Security Council, the Twelve and others. We fully expect it to be the subject of debate at the next general assembly.

Special Forces

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister if it has now become the policy of Her Majesty's Government to reveal details of the operations of United Kingdom special forces.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 17 May 1991 at column *281*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Non-audit Fees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what draft statutory instrument he has circulated on disclosure of non-audit fees paid by companies to their auditors; to whom it has been circulated; and with what closing date.

Mr. Redwood: Officials have circulated a draft of possible regulations to be made under section 390B of the Companies Act 1985, as inserted by section 121 of the Companies Act 1989. The draft was sent to the major professional accountancy bodies with an interest; to the larger accountancy firms; to the Law Society and the Law Society of Scotland; to the CBI; and to a number of other persons who asked to see it. Comments were invited by 16 May, or shortly thereafter.

Liquidators

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which anyone acting as a liquidator will be required to publish financial information about his business.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times since 1986, his Department has taken action to remove company liquidators.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has the power to remove a liquidator only where he made the initial appointment following an application by an official receiver. Since 1986 the Secretary of State has not removed any liquidators whom he has appointed.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has received from shareholders expressing dissatisfaction with the work and standards of United Kingdom auditors;

(2) what representations he has received from company directors expressing dissatisfaction with the work and standards of United Kingdom auditors.

Mr. Redwood: My Department receives a variety of such representations.

Official Receiver (Investigations)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to require the results of the Official Receiver's investigations into companies to be published.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has no plans to introduce legislation to require the Official Receiver to publish the results of his investigations. Under the provisions of the Insolvency Act 1986, the Official Receiver has a statutory duty to investigate the affairs of companies in compulsory liquidation and report prima facie evidence of criminal misconduct to officials at Insolvency Service headquarters. He also has a duty under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 to report unfitted conduct by directors of companies in compulsory liquidation to the Secretary of State. The Official Receiver is required to make a report to creditors and contributories on the proceedings in the liquidation and the state of the company's affairs and to file a copy of that report in court.

Companies Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, further to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *580*, he will indicate which of the inspectors have come from the auditing firms criticised by his Department's inspectors.

Mr. Redwood: Of the six cases listed, two inspectors come from accountancy firms criticised in reports of inspectors published since June 1979.

Name of Inspector	Name of Firm	Published Inspectors Report	Date of Publication
Mr. J. White FCA	KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Orbit Holdings Limited	23 December 1981
		Alexander Howden Holdings plc	29 August 1990
Mr. J. K. Heywood FCA	Price Waterhouse	Norwest Holst Limited	23 June 1982
		Ramor Investments Limited	22 March 1983

Insolvency Practitioners

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many liquidators/receivers have been appointed by the insolvency service.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has power to appoint liquidators in compulsory liquidations and trustees in bankruptcy following application by an Official Receiver. Statistics do not differentiate between liquidators and trustees, but during the year to 31 March 1990, a total of 2,081 appointments were made, and in the year to 31 March 1991 there were 2,356.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been lodged with him or the Insolvency Service about the conduct of insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Redwood: Statistics relating to the number of complaints received by the Secretary of State or the Insolvency Service are not kept. However, I can confirm that, in addition to ministerial correspondence, the Insolvency Service receives correspondence from interested parties of companies in liquidation or receivership, or of bankrupts where some dissatisfaction concerning the practitioner is voiced.

Bankruptcies

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of companies *(a)* in the west midlands and *(b)* in north Staffordshire which have gone bankrupt in each of the last nine months.

Mr. Redwood: This information could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Clothing Industry

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact on jobs in the knitwear and hosiery industry of state intervention in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the lifting of import controls on goods from these countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: At present, in almost half the multi-fibre arrangement knitwear and hosiery categories, no quota limits are imposed on imports from the three countries and in nearly all the remaining categories the quotas are either little used or not used at all. It is not therefore anticipated that trade liberalisation is likely to have a significant effect on knitwear and hosiery in the United Kingdom.

Geomagnetism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what approaches he has had from the British Geological Survey on geomagnetism; and what response he has given.

Mr. Redwood: A number of approaches were made to officials in the early part of last year. While sympathetic to the requirement for a continued programme of regular monitoring of the earth's geomagnetic field, the response given was that the programme was of marginal relevance to the work of the Department and that support could not therefore be provided.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will acquire for his Department's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

Mr. Lilley: A copy is being acquired by the departmental library and information services.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industry on the proposed changes to the ECGD; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: A number of exporters, representatives of trade associations and representatives of the ECGD's staff have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the proposed privatisation of the short-term business of the ECGD.

European Coal and Steel Community

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the position taken by his Department on the future of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty which was discussed at the meeting of the EC Industry Council on 29 April.

Mr. Sainsbury: My noble Friend the Minister for Industry welcomed the initiative the European Commission had taken in looking at the future of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. He indicated that the Government's preferred solution was an immediate termination of the treaty so that coal and steel would be governed by the EEC treaty in the same way as other industries. While the Government were disappointed that the Commission had not taken the same view, they welcomed the Commission's view that a much less interventionist interpretation and application of the treaty

was necessary pending a transition to the EC regime in 2002. To this end, my noble Friend asked the Commission to set out a timetable for the necessary work and to report regularly to the Council on the results.

ENERGY

Iraqi Nuclear Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority or the nuclear installations inspectorate was *(a)* asked for or *(b)* offered any assistance to the International Atomic Energy Agency in developing appropriate methods of taking custody and verifying inventories of Iraqi nuclear materials before 17 May, as mandated by United Nation Security Council resolution 687 of 2 April.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No formal request has been received from the IAEA or formal offer made by the UK authorities in relation to the matters raised in the question. However, there have been a number of discussions with the agency on points relating to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 687. The agency's board of governors held a special meeting on the matter on 6 May.

Plutonium (Transport)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 25 April, *Official Report*, column *497*, if he will list all the options being considered for the transportation of plutonium that has been reprocessed to its country of origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc which is currently considering the transport options for returning the plutonium arising from reprocessing spent fuel from overseas.

Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 25 April, *Official Report*, column *497*, when he expects to receive agreement from the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate to restart the two reactors at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In my reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 14 March, *Official Report*, columns *634-35*, I explained that the shutting down of the two reactors at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station was an operational matter for Nuclear Electric plc, and that the reactors would not be returned to power until the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate is satisfied with NE's safety case for such action. NE's preparation of the safety case is continuing.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment has been made *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by the energy technology support unit of the feasibility and potential benefits of the interspacing of trees grown for bio-fuels and aero-generator wind power machines at suitable sites in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan: No detailed assessment of the potential benefits of interspacing trees and aero-generators has been made. Basic principles dictate that the ground around wind generators should be as smooth as possible. The extra roughness arising from trees would be detrimental to the efficiency of the wind turbines. Wind farms are therefore likely to be on land which is otherwise used for normal agricultural purposes.

Energy Market

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what regulations and economic incentives he proposes to introduce to intervene in the energy market.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government work to promote the operation of market forces in the energy sector wherever practicable, while taking action to fulfil their responsibilities in relation to security and diversity of supply, health and safety, energy efficiency, the protection of the environment and other matters.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting in Brussels on 13 May between his Department and the European Commission's directorate-general XVII on energy conservation policy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The meeting to which the hon. Member refers was a seminar organised by the European Commission's DGXVII on improving energy efficiency in buildings, with particular reference to labelling and insulation. Member states, industry and other interested parties gave their views on work which DGXVII has commissioned prior to drawing up proposals for legislation. The Commission indicated its intention to formulate draft directives for consideration by the Council in the light of the views expressed.

Departmental Headquarters

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to respond to the 10th report of the Committee of Public Accounts on the new headquarters building for his Department.

Mr. Wakeham: A response to the Committee's report is expected to be presented to Parliament in a Treasury minute before the summer recess.

Electricity Consumption

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many units of electricity per person are used currently in each region of England and Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Sales of electricity and numbers of consumers, by type of consumer, are analysed for each of the old area electricity boards in England and Wales in table 58 of the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1990".

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to offer to the International Energy Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a technical review by his Department of the report entitled "Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The Energy Dimension".

Mr. Moynihan: "Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The Energy Dimension" was produced by the secretariats of the International Energy Agency—IEA—and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—OECD—with the guidance of their relevant committees. An earlier version was provided as informal input to the deliberations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—IPCC. As its explanatory note makes clear, the report reflects the perspectives of the secretariats and not necessarily those of all the IEA and OECD member countries.

The Government regard this report as another useful contribution to the discussion on global climate change. It represents a view assembled by the IEA and OECD secretariats at a particular time, and a wide range of further work is continuing, both in international organisations and in countries. For that reason, the Department does not propose to offer a technical review of the report.

Onshore Petroleum Exploration

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about further onshore petroleum licensing.

Mr. Moynihan: The Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulations 1991—SI 1991 No. 981—came into force on 9 May. I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses the text of a notice, which will be published as soon as possible in the official *Gazette*, inviting companies to apply for exploration licences in respect of unlicensed areas in Great Britain and certain near shore waters. The notice specifies that applications should be made on 19 or 20 June 1991. Application forms and guidance notes will be available from my Department.

I shall separately be inviting holders of production licences to apply to transfer exploration acreage within their existing licences to the new style exploration licences, subject to agreement being reached on a satisfactory work programme for the area.

Successful applicants will be offered exploration licences containing the conditions set out in the new Regulations. The licences will grant rights for a term of six years and entitle the licensee to carry out seismic surveys and deep drilling subject to the need to obtain the requisite permission from the appropriate mineral planning authorities and land owners and occupiers.

WALES

Farm Diversification

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals to offer farmers in Wales new schemes for on-farm diversification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The farm diversification grant scheme already provides grant assistance to farmers wishing to diversify into non-agricultural profit-making activities on their farm.

Ynysyplwm Hospital

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if agreement has been reached on the planned road links between existing highways and the new district general hospital to be constructed at Ynysyplwm.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Mid Glamorgan health authority is presently in negotiation with the Mid Glamorgan county council about the access road proposals for the proposed new district general hospital at Ynysyplwm.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if agreement has been reached on the sources of funding for the planned road links between existing highways and the new district general hospital to be constructed at Ynysyplwm.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The planned road links from the existing highways will form part of the overall construction cost of the new hospital.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the estimated costs of the planned road links between existing highways and the new district general hospital to be constructed at Ynysyplwm.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The planned road links for this new hospital have not yet been finalised or costed.

Manufacturing Industry

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many new jobs have been created in Wales in the manufacturing sector since 1 January;

(2) how many jobs have been lost in Wales in the manufacturing sector since 1 January.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information detailing jobs lost or created in the manufacturing sector since 1 January 1991 is not available.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of manufacturing firms recorded as working below capacity in Wales in the first quarter of 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information on the percentage of manufacturing firms recorded as working below capacity is not recorded centrally.

Employment Statistics

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the level of employment in *(a)* the car component manufacturing sector and *(b)* the electronics sector in Wales in each month since 1 January.

Mr. David Hunt: Information detailing levels of employment in the car component and electronics sectors in Wales since 1 January 1991 is not available.

Welsh Development Agency

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who is the head of the inward investment division of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. David Hunt: The inward investment division of the Welsh Development Agency, Welsh Development

International, is the responsibility of the agency's executive director, marketing, Mr. Ian Rooks. The appointment of a new head of Welsh Development International, reporting to Mr. Rooks, is expected to be announced shortly.

Earnings

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a breakdown of current earnings in Wales, showing the numbers and percentages of employees earning in each £5,000 band of income per annum up to £30,000 per annum and over £30,000 per annum.

Mr. David Hunt: Estimates for the total earned income of residents of Wales, obtained from the 1988-89 survey of personal incomes, are given in the table. Earnings are for individuals—husbands and wives shown separately—regardless of source, with investment income excluded. The estimates are net of superannuation contributions. Coverage of earned income below £5,000 is incomplete and, as a result, the percentages requested cannot be calculated.

Earned income per annum	*Number of individuals (thousands)*
£5,001 to £10,000	428
£10,001 to £15,000	223
£15,001 to £20,000	72
£20,001 to £25,000	20
£25,001 to £30,000	8
£30,001 and over	16

Company Stock

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the change in the level of company stock in Wales between April 1990 and April 1991.

Mr. Hunt: The information requested is not available.

Groundwater Monitoring

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether underground flows of water in Wales are being monitored for signs of pollution originating in badly drained and maintained silage clamps on farms.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Yes. The National Rivers Authority monitors groundwater in Wales, principally that used for potable supplies, at points of emergence. The Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations 1991—SI No. 324—which come into force on 1 September will reduce considerably risks to controlled waters by setting construction standards and strengthening the NRA's powers.

Underground Mines

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the planning appeals relative to applications for underground coal mines currently under consideration by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Water Pollution

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prosecutions of water polluters have been started in Wales since the formation of the National Rivers Authority; and how many have been successful.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for the National Rivers Authority.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Taiwan

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what machinery exists to enable communication between the Taiwanese authorities and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no governmental dealings with the authorities in Taiwan. There are established unofficial means through which British interests are promoted.

Tristan da Cunha

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will dispatch fishery protection vessels to Tristan da Cunha to prevent illegal drift net fishing in the exclusion zone around the islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels visiting Tristan da Cunha supplement the fisheries protection work of the Tristan authorities. The most recent visit was by RFA Diligence on 15 and 16 May. She did not locate any unlicensed fishing vessels.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Taiwanese authorities concerning drift net fishing in the exclusion zone around the Tristan da Cunha group of islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have no governmental dealings with the authorities in Taiwan. The Taiwan authorities are, however, aware of our concern over press reports that Taiwanese vessels have been undertaking drift net fishing in the exclusion zone around the Tristan da Cunha group of islands.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends to take to prevent drift net fishing in the exclusion zone around Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Garel-Jones: At present RN and RFA vessels visiting Tristan da Cunha supplement the fisheries protection work of the Tristan authorities. We are considering what further action we might be able to take to prevent drift netting in the exclusion zone around Tristan da Cunha.

European Conventions

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the provisions of the conventions of the council of Europe which have been enacted into United Kingdom law since 1961.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Since 1961 the United Kingdom has ratified the following Council of Europe conventions and protocols. Before ratification, where necessary, legislation was enacted or other implementing measures were introduced.

European Convention on Establishment.
European Convention on Extradition.
European Agreement on the Exchange of Therapeutic Substances of Human Origin.
European Agreement on the Abolition of Visas for Refugees.
European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications.
European Agreement on the Protection of Television Broadcasts.
European Social Charter.
Fourth Protocol to the General Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the Council of Europe.
European Agreement on Travel by Young Persons on Collective Passports between the Member Countries of the Council of Europe.
European Agreement on Mutual Assistance in the Matter of Special Medical Treatments and Climatic Facilities.
European Agreement on the Exchanges of Blood-Grouping Reagents.
Agreement between the Member States of the Council of Europe on the Issue to Military and Civilian War—Disabled of an International Book of Vouchers for the Repair of Prosthetic and Orthopaedic Appliances.
Convention on the Liability of Hotel-Keepers Concerning the Property of Their Guests.
Convention on the Reduction of Cases of Multiple Nationality and on Military Obligations in cases of Multiple Nationality
Protocol No. 2 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Conferring Upon the European Court of Human Rights Competence to Give Advisory Opinions
Protocol No. 3 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Amending Articles 29, 30 and 34 of the Convention
Convention on the Unification of Certain Points of Substantive Law on Patents for Invention
European Code of Social Security
Protocol to the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas Leading to Admission to Universities
Convention on the Elaboration of a European Pharmacopoeia
European Agreement for the Prevention of Broadcasts Transmitted from Stations Outside National Territories
Protocol to the European Agreement on the Protection of Television Broadcasts
Protocol No. 5 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Amending Articles 22 and 40 of the Convention
European Convention on the Adoption of Children
European Agreement on the Instruction and Education of Nurses
European Convention on Information on Foreign Law
European Convention on the Abolition of Legalisation of Documents Executed by Diplomatic Agents or Consular Officers
European Agreement on the Restriction of the Use of Certain Detergents in Washing and Cleaning Products
European Convention for the Protection of Animals During International Transport
European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage
European Agreement Relating to Persons Participating in Proceedings of the European Commission and Court of Human Rights
European Agreement on Continued Payment on Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad
European Convention on State Immunity
Additional Protocol to the Protocol to the European Agreement on the Protection of Television Broadcasts
European Convention on the Social Protection of Farmers
European Agreement on the Exchange of Tissue-Typing Reagents
European Convention on the Legal Status of Children Born Out of Wedlock
European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept For Farming Purposes
Additional Protocol to the European Agreement on the Exchange of Tissue-Typing Reagents
European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism
European Agreement on the Transmission of Applications for Legal Aid
Protocol Amending the Convention on the Reduction of Cases of Multiple Nationality and Military Obligations in Cases of Multiple Nationality
Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Information on Foreign Law
Additional Protocol to the European Convention for the Protection of Animals During International Transport
Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats
European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children
European Agreement on Transfer of Responsibility for Refugees
Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data
Additional Protocol to the European Agreement on the Exchange of Therapeutic Substances of Human Origin
Additional Protocol to the Agreement on the Temporary Importation Free of Duty of Medical, Surgical and Laboratory Equipment for Use on Free Loan in Hospitals and Medical Institutions for Diagnosis or Treatment
Additional Protocol to the European Agreement on the Exchanges of Blood-Grouping Reagents
Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons
Additional Protocol to the Protocol to the European Agreement on the Protection of Television Broadcasts
Protocol Amending the European Agreement on the Restriction of the Use of Certain Detergents in Washing and Cleaning Products
European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes
Protocol No. 8 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in Particular at Football Matches
Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe
European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organisations
European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
Convention on Insider Trading
Third Additional Protocol to the Protocol to the European Agreement on the Protection of Television Broadcasts
Protocol to the Convention on Insider Trading
Protocol to the Convention on the Elaboration of a European Pharmacopoeia
Anti-Doping Convention

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will acquire for his Department's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters concerning environmental protection and pollution control were discussed between members of the European Foreign

Affairs Council and their counterparts from the European Free Trade Association member states in their meeting on 13 to 15 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: EC and EFTA Ministers met on 13 May to review progress in the negotiations on a European economic area—EEA. This will extend the single market to the EFTA countries, and promote co-operation in a range of other areas, including in the environmental field. Ministers noted that there was a substantial convergence of views between the two sides on those elements which should figure in the EEA agreement.

Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts have taken place between the Indian high commission and Ministers or officials in his Department since 1987 about Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

UNESCO

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will undertake a further substantive review of the situation at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation with a view to making a decision on the United Kingdom renewing its membership of the organisation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. I met the Director-General of UNESCO on 5 April, and made clear that we needed to see more concrete progress before we could consider rejoining the organisation.

Border Controls

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will place in the Library an English language translation of the Shengen agreement.

Mr. Garel-Jones *[pursuant to his reply, 23 April 1991, c. 413]:* We are arranging to place a copy of the document in the Library of the House.

Privatisation

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the German proposal for an EC treaty amendment to the effect that member states should endeavour to transfer state-owned companies to private ownership.

Mr. Maude: I have been asked to reply.

Although the Government support the objective of the German amendment, they do not believe that this should be a matter for Community competence or legislation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Racial Attacks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to protect the black community on Thamesmead estate in Greenwich following the recent murders there.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Operational decisions and the deployment of officers in Greenwich, as in the rest of the Metropolitan police district, are the responsibility of the Commissioner. I have every confidence in the ability of the Metropolitan police to protect the black community on the Thamesmead estate. Within days of the murders of Mr. Rolan Adams and Mr. Orville Blair, suspects were arrested and charged.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are being made to increase the level of reporting to the police of racial attacks.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: All chief officers are fully aware of the need to respond to racial attacks as a priority and to ensure that such attacks are properly recorded. Police forces have developed a range of methods to improve reporting, In co-operation with other local agencies, which are closely monitored by HM inspectorate of constabulary. These include the provision of information to ethnic minority communities, support and counselling for victims of racial attacks and an effective priority response in dealing with perpetrators. The police service's implementation of broader policies on equal opportunities and quality of service has one of its central objectives improving the confidence of ethnic minority communities in reporting crimes to the police.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racial attacks were reported to the police during 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Six thousand four hundred and fifty-nine racially motivated incidents were reported to police forces in England and Wales during 1990.

Police, Leicestershire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the budget allocated to policing Leicestershire for each of the years from 1979 to 1990, together with the percentage increase or decrease from year to year over this period, discounting inflation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The budget of a police force is set by its police authority. Expenditure on the Leicestershire police force between 1979-80 and 1989-90, in cash and real terms, is set out below. During this period, the Home Office paid specific grant on the net expenditure of provincial police forces at the rate of 50 per cent. up to 1985-86 and 51 per cent. from 1986-87.

Year	*Actual expenditure*	*Expenditure in real terms*[1]	*Percentage year on year real terms increase*
	£	£	
1979-80	18,688,636	37,501,025	—
1980-81	22,885,914	38,808,102	3·49
1981-82	27,538,410	42,585,609	9·73
1982-83	30,829,200	44,512,915	4·53
1983-84	36,602,856	50,513,174	13·48
1984-85	48,046,872	63,101,668	24·92
1985-86	37,382,252	46,564,838	−26·21
1986-87	41,810,682	50,336,715	8·10
1987-88	45,463,839	51,962,830	3·23
1988-89	49,660,357	52,825,109	1·66
1989-90	57,279,465	57,279,465	8·43

[1] At 1989-90 prices using GDP deflator.

The real terms increase in expenditure between 1979-80 and 1989-90 was 53 per cent.

Forensic Science Service

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what system of charging the new forensic science service will introduce to cover its costs; (2) what was the annual average expenditure on the Crown forensic service for each of the past three years; and what will be the annual rate of expenditure of the new forensic science service.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many forensic scientists employed by the forensic science service have moved to managerial posts under the new arrangements for an executive agency; and how many years' experience as forensic scientists these individuals had accumulated before undertaking managerial posts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These have been passed to the director general of the forensic science service who will be replying shortly. A copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with the National Association of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing and Enforcement Officers, regarding the disclosure of criminal records; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The association wrote to my right hon. Friend about this in April. Our reply informed them that the matter would be considered in the context of the response to the scrutiny of criminal records which reported at the end of April.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the disclosure of criminal records of the convictions of taxi licence applicants since last October and over the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received 65 representations on this subject during the period 17 June 1990—16 May 1991, some 50 of them after 1 November 1990. In addition, we have had regular discussions and exchanges of correspondence with the Association of County Councils, the Association of District Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations, and from whom, he has received on the disclosure of criminal records of taxi licence applicants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available.

Prisons

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales have been diagnosed as having a mental illness.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 31 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, 290 inmates were reported by prison medical officers to be mentally disordered as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983. Of these, 237 were reported to be mentally ill.

The Government encourage the diversion of mentally disordered offenders from the penal system whenever custody is not necessary in the public interest.

Violence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constables of police on police policy on reconciliation in *(a)* domestic violence cases and *(b)* other criminal violence cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Home Office guidance on domestic violence advises police not to attempt reconciliation in such cases, although they may give advice about the appropriate sources of help which are available.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which other EC countries have developed reciprocal systems for ensuring absent parents contribute towards the maintenance of their children.

Mr. John Patten: All EC countries are party to conventions which facilitate the reciprocal recognition and enforcement of child maintenance. In the past, not all have invested the same effort as the United Kingdom in the enforcement process, and we have played a leading part in the preparation of a new convention. We signed this last year and have already met its requirements for some time. The convention will establish common administrative arrangements to support previous international agreements.

Miners Welfare Act 1952

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to reverse the effect of the Charity Commissioners' decision to interpret the Miners Welfare Act 1952 so as to define miners, rather than ex-miners and families, as the sole beneficiaries of the social and welfare activities within the meaning of the Act.

Mr. John Patten: The provisions of the 1952 Act already include ex-miners and their dependants within the social and welfare benefits of the Act. I have no information about any decision of the Charity Commissioners which would affect the provisions of the Act, but if the hon. Member has further details she may wish to write to the chief commissioner direct.

Skateboarding

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the local authorities that have adopted his Department's model byelaw on the banning of skateboarding on carriageways and roads under section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Our records indicate that 66 local authorities have adopted the model byelaw which prohibits the use of skateboards and roller skates on footways and carriageways to the danger of other persons lawfully using the footway or carriageway. The local authorities are as follows:

Adur District Council
Arun District Council
Babergh District Council

Beverley Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Bracknell District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Bury Borough Council
Calderdale Borough Council
Caradon District Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Chichester District Council
Colchester Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Dover District Council
Fareham Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Hart District Council
Hastings Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Isles of Scilly Council
Kettering Borough Council
Leeds City Council
Litchfield District Council
Luton Borough Council
Maldon District Council
Melton Borough Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Montgomeryshire District Council
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Newport Borough Council
North Devon District Council
Peterborough City Council
Poole Borough Council
Reading Borough Council
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Rhymney Valley District Council
Rother District Council
Salisbury District Council
Scarborough Borough Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Shepway District Council
Slough Borough Council
Southampton City Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
South Lakeland District Council
South Northamptonshire District Council
South Shropshire District Council
South Tyneside Borough Council
South Wight Borough Council
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Sutton Borough Council
Tendring District Council
Thanet District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Warrington Borough Council
Wokingham District Council
Woodspring District Council
Worcester City Council
Worthing Borough Council
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council
Wychavon District Council
Wycombe District Council

Child Abuse

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, following the conclusion of the Crown court case in Liverpool concerning the wardship of children involved in Operation Clementine, he has any plans to review procedures used in cases concerning allegations of child abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am not aware of any complaints about police procedures in this investigation, which was carried out by the Merseyside police and Liverpool social services department. My right hon. Friend has no plans for a fundamental review of police procedures. Home Office officials are assisting in the revision of "Working Together" which is being undertaken by the Department of Health. Some additional guidance for the police to complement Home Office circular 52/1988 is likely to be issued when the revised "Working Together" is published.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases are currently awaiting consideration under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in England and Wales and in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of April 1991, 59,919 applications were awaiting decision by a board member, 11,560 cases were out on offer to applicants and 10,690 cases were awaiting an oral hearing by the board. Figures for cases in progress are not available separately for England and Wales and for Scotland.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement sections 108 to 117 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; and what he estimates the timetable of that implementation will be.

Mr. John Patten: Sections 108 to 117 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 provide a statutory basis for the present ex-gratia criminal injuries compensation scheme. No date has been set for implementation, which has been deferred for the time being at the request of the board to allow it to concentrate on dealing with the present backlog of cases, which is being reduced. The then Home Secretary set out more fully the reasons for this decision, together with certain changes in the non-statutory scheme, to bring it more closely into line with the provisions of the 1988 Act, in a written answer on 8 December 1989 at columns *409-17* to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler).

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claimants under the criminal injuries compensation scheme have their awards paid directly to a trust or sequestrator; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The board does not keep totals of such cases, but I understand that they are rare.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made to implement the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee to appoint additional staff to the Glasgow office; what progress has been made in clearing the backlog of claims under the criminal injuries compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We agreed immediately to all the 60 extra staff recommended in the report of the Select Committee (HC 92) in February 1990 and they have been in post in the Glasgow office since last summer. As a result of this and other measures described in the Government reply to the report (Cm. 1153), the number of cases outstanding has been reduced by about 8,000 over the last year to 82,000.

Police Authorities (Expenditure)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for county police authorities in England the amounts spent in the most recent year available in rank order, together with the standard spending assessment for the police service and the expenditure per head of population.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The table shows, for 1990-91, the net revenue budget of each English county police force, as notified by the police authority; the police component of each county's standard spending assessment; the relevant population of the county; and the budget divided by the population.

County police authorities	*Police expenditure budget 1990-91 £000's*	*Police component[1] of standard spending 1990-91 £000's*	*Relevant population[2]*	*Budget expenditure per head (£'s)*
Hampshire	113,507	54,289	1,270,689	89·33
Kent	111,966	51,544	1,146,137	97·69
Lancashire	107,559	52,506	1,048,010	102·63
Essex	105,185	49,255	1,112,214	94·57
Nottinghamshire	77,189	38,358	760,662	101·48
Humberside	71,838	32,963	652,686	110·07
Staffordshire	71,162	36,207	786,924	90·43
Leicestershire	64,058	29,124	651,831	98·27
Cheshire	62,851	30,911	717,303	87·62
Derbyshire	61,545	29,670	713,956	86·20
Hertfordshire	59,996	29,917	626,156	95·82
Surrey	56,061	30,103	579,252	96·78
North Yorkshire	48,072	22,886	537,558	89·43
Cleveland	47,627	24,640	411,180	115·83
Norfolk	47,175	22,538	574,129	82·17
Dorset	46,771	20,801	502,671	93·04
Durham	44,554	22,753	456,057	97·69
Suffolk	43,565	19,626	469,891	92·71
Lincolnshire	41,871	19,576	452,504	92·53
Northamptonshire	41,689	18,550	422,651	98·64
Cumbria	41,485	19,129	383,556	108·16
Cambridgeshire	40,590	19,824	477,192	85·06
Wiltshire	39,647	17,954	419,830	94·44
Gloucestershire	39,285	19,262	398,399	98·61
Warwickshire	36,943	16,415	364,929	101·23
Bedfordshire	35,782	18,039	394,078	90·80
Totals	1,557,973	746,840	16,330,445	95·40

[1]Standard level of expenditure on the police after specific grant has been deducted.
[2]Number on community charge register in force area.

Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contacts have taken place between Ministers or officials in his Department and the Indian high commission since 1987 about Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am not aware of any contacts of this kind having taken place with the Indian high commission about Mr. Bedi before or since 1987. If the hon. Member believes that such contacts have taken place, I should be grateful if he would provide me with the details.

Stuart Bower

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision on the case of Stuart Bower.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend hopes to reach a decision shortly. I have promised to write to the hon. Member as soon as a decision has been reached.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were transferred under the provisions of circular 3790, and its predecessor circular 1074 from dispersal prisons in England and Wales for each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for St Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 16 May at column *239*.

Derbyshire Police

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the standard spending assessment for police in Derbyshire for 1991-92 and for previous years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Standard spending assessments were introduced in 1990-91. Previously the Government's assumptions of local authorities' spending needs were expressed in grant-related expenditure assessments. The police component of GREAs contained elements for interest receipts and capital financing costs, which are now included in a separate component of local authorities' SSAs.

The police components of Derbyshire county council's GREA or SSA since 1987-88 are shown in the table.

Year	*£m*
1987-88	22·315
1988-89	25·004
1989-90	27·376
1990-91	29·670
1991-92	32·276

Foreign Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male and female prisoners in England and Wales were subsequently deported; and if he will list the countries of origin, for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Figures in the form requested have been held centrally only for the years since 1986. The figures in the table relate to deportation under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971, where a recommendation for deportation made by a court was part of a custodial sentence, or under section 3(5)(b) of that Act where deportation on conducive grounds followed a custodial sentence.

Deportations following a custodial sentence

	1987		1988		1989		1990	
Nationals of:	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Algeria	5		2		4		3	
Anguilla							1	
Australia	2		2	1	1		4	
Austria			1		1			
Bahrain							1	
Bangladesh	3		3		4			
Barbados					1			
Belgium	2		1		1		2	1
Bolivia		3		1	1		1	
Brazil	1						3	
Burkina Faso					2			
Canada	2		3		1			
Chile	4		5				1	
Colombia	3	2	5	4	6	1	11	2
Cyprus	1		2		2		1	
Denmark	2		1		1		1	
Egypt	1		2		1			
Finland			1					
France	4	1	2		4	1	1	2
Gambia		1	1					
Germany	4		4		3		5	1
Ghana	26	8	21	6	20	13	13	4
Greece	1		1		1		2	
Grenada						1		
Guyana	1		1					
Hong Kong	5		1	1	3		2	
Iceland			1					
India	10	3	19	1	15	2	20	2
Indonesia					1			
Iran	2		3		6			
Iraq	2		1		1		1	
Irish Republic	14		16		11		7	
Israel					2		1	
Italy	11		10	1	7		8	1
Ivory Coast			1					
Jamaica	7	3	14	14	12	8	13	7
Jordan	1		1		1		3	
Kenya	2		5		2		3	
Kuwait	1							
Lebanon	1		3		1			
Libya	1		3					
Malawi							1	
Malaysia	4		2	1	3		1	
Malta							1	
Mauritius	1				2			
Morocco	5		3		3			
Netherlands	8		13		8		6	4
New Zealand			1		1		2	
Nigeria	94	16	130	24	151	44	137	41
Norway				1	1		1	
Oman					1			
Pakistan	19	1	29	1	19	1	17	1
Peru						1		
Portugal			2		1			
St. Lucia			1				1	
St. Vincent			1					
Saudi Arabia					1			
Sierra Leone	1				1			
Singapore	2		1	1	3		2	1
South Africa	3				1		5	
Spain	1		1	1	3	1	1	
Sri Lanka	2		3				1	
Sweden					1			
Switzerland			3		1			
Syria			2				1	
Thailand					1		1	

Nationals of:	1987 Males	1987 Females	1988 Males	1988 Females	1989 Males	1989 Females	1990 Males	1990 Females
Togo					1			
Trinidad and Tobago	1						2	1
Tunisia							2	
Turkey	6		4		6		4	
Uganda	1		3		2		2	
United States of America		2	5		8	2	10	
Uruguay			1					
Venezuela	1							
Yugoslavia			1					
Zambia					1			
Zimbabwe	1		1				4	1
Totals	269	40	342	58	336	75	311	69

THE ARTS

Works of Art (Export Licences)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Arts what consideration is given to their likely end use when consideration is given to whether to issue on export licence for important works of art; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Exports of works of art go to private or public collections. The likely end use of a work of art after export is not a relevant consideration for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he is deciding whether to grant an export licence.

Edinburgh Art Galleries

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with Professor Alan Peacock, chairman of the Scottish Arts Council, about the closure of art galleries in Edinburgh; what representations he has received on this matter; if he will instruct his Department to carry out an inquiry into the work of the Scottish Arts Council and its funding of the visual arts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My last meeting with the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council was during my visit to Scotland from 4 to 7 May. I am aware of the difficulties facing some Edinburgh art galleries, but I have received no written representations about them. I can see no need to call for an enquiry into the council's funding of the visual arts.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Indirect Tax

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what stage has been reached in the European Council's deliberations concerning an indirect tax regime; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) on 17 May 1991, *Official Report*, columns *314-15*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables showing separately for England, Wales and Scotland grants to local authorities from central Government net of non-domestic rate income, for 1990-91 and 1991-92, and showing separately expressed in £ million and as a percentage for (i) specific grants within aggregate external finance, (ii) revenue support grant, (iii) area protection grant, (iv) Inner London education grant, (v) housing grants and (vi) other specific grants.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is set out in the tables. The figures given are consistent with those published in the "Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement"—Cm. 1520; the 1991-92 figures also incorporate the additional grants announced this year to reduce the levels of community charge bills.

Central Government Grants to Local Authorities in England

	1990-91 £ million	1990-91 percentage	1991-92 £ million	1991-92 percentage
Revenue support grant	9,490	44·8	9,674	35·2
Area protection grant[1]	88	0·4	485	1·8
Inner London education grant	102	0·3	70	0·3
Other current grants within AEF	3,146	14·9	7,760	28·3
Total AEF	12,827	60·6	17,989	65·5
Housing current grants	2,324	11·0	2,380	8·7
Other current grants outside AEF	5,050	23·9	5,845	21·3
Housing capital grants	337	1·6	456	1·7
Other capital grants	632	3·0	789	2·9
Total grants	21,170	100·0	27,459	100·0

[1] Includes low rateable value areas grant.

Central Government Grants to Local Authorities in Scotland

	1990-91		*1991-92*	
	£ million	*Percentage*	*£ million*	*Percentage*
Revenue support grant	2,496	69·6	2,651	62·9
Area protection grant[1]	30	0·8	15	0·4
Other current grants within AEF	272	7·6	752	17·8
Total AEF	2,768	77·2	3,403	80·7
Housing current grants	—	—	—	—
Other current grants outside AEF	782	21·8	752	17·8
Housing capital grants	3	0·1	2	0·1
Other capital grants	35	1·0	59	1·4
Total grants	3,587	100·0	4,215	100·0

[1] Area protection grant in Scotland is amalgamated with revenue support grant for distribution purposes.

Central Government Grants to Local Authorities in Wales

	1990-91		*1991-92*	
	£ million	*Percentage*	*£ million*	*Percentage*
Revenue support grant	1,141	60·2	1,236	53·3
Other current grants within AEF	162	8·5	443	19·1
Total AEF	1,303	68·7	1,679	72·4
Housing current grants	160	8·4	189	8·2
Other current grants outside AEF	275	14·4	293	12·6
Housing capital grants	103	5·4	87	3·8
Other capital grants	58	3·0	67	2·9
Total grants	1,897	100·0	2,319	100·0

Mortgages

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total increased costs to a married couple with two children on average earnings with an average mortgage, of the interest rate rises over the past two years.

Mr. Maude: The monthly interest payment, net of basic rate tax relief, on an average mortgage in May 1989 was £210·94. At the May 1991 interest rate of 12·9 per cent., the payment on that mortgage would be £201·56.

Charities (VAT)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional revenue to Her Majesty's Government in the current year from the income of registered charities, as a result of the increase in VAT.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that detailed information of this sort is not readily available.

School Meals (VAT)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the levying of value-added tax on meals provided to pupils in schools by private firms, and the treatment of school meals provided directly by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have received one recent letter on this matter. VAT arises only on supplies made by way of business by a VAT registered person. Where a local authority supplies school meals incidental to its provision of education, either direct or via a contractor, those supplies are not by way of business and thus fall outside the scope of VAT. If a local authority ceases to provide a school meal service, and a private firm supplies catering direct to pupils, that is by way of business and VAT falls to be charged.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions exist for the Inland Revenue to ascertain the beneficial ownership of large estates in order to levy appropriate rates of inheritance tax.

Mr. Maude: Inheritance tax is levied on chargeable transfers of value, mainly deemed transfers on death. The Inland Revenue has power to require personal representatives of deceased persons, the trustees of settled property, the donees of chargeable lifetime gifts and others to deliver accounts and to pay inheritance tax. It also has the power, with the consent of the Special Commissioners, to require any person to supply such information as the Board of Inland Revenue requires for inheritance tax purposes. There are no special provisions for large estates.

Football Pools Betting Duty

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his best estimate of the amount of money that has been provided to Vauxhall Conference clubs through the pools betting duty for each of the past 10 years and as a total over the same period.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* None. Pool betting duty was reduced in 1990 on condition that the whole of the amount saved would be passed onto the Football Trust 1990 and spent on ground

improvements of clubs in the Football League and the Scottish Football League and on the three national stadiums—Wembley, Hampden Park and Windsor Park.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to render clubs in the Vauxhall Conference eligible for financial aid via the revenue provided as a result of the reduction in the football pools betting duty announced in the 1990 Budget; if he will state the proportion of revenue provided through pools betting duty for which clubs in the Vauxhall Conference are eligible to apply; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* I do not intend to make clubs in the Vauxhall Conference eligible to benefit from the reduction in pool betting duty announced in the 1990 budget. They receive no such support at present. They are, of course, eligible for support from the Football Trust 1990 provided the finance comes from other sources, such as donations resulting from the spotting-the-ball competition.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his best estimate of the total amount of money raised in football pools betting duty from matches played in the Vauxhall Conference or its predecessor league for each of the past 10 years and as a total over the same period.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* I am unable to make any estimate, as pool betting duty is charged on aggregate weekly stakes regardless of the individual events to which the stakes relate.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Meals

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the expenditure on the school meal service in each year since 1976 in cash and real terms.

Mr. Fallon: The latest year for which information on actual expenditure on school meals and milk is available is 1988-89. The available information is as follows:

Net expenditure on school meals and milk[1]

Year	*Cash £ millions*	*Real terms*[2] *£ millions*
1975-76	318	1,002
1976-77	382	1,060
1977-78	365	891
1978-79	388	854
1979-80	422	796
1980-81	397	633
1981-82	397	577
1982-83	411	558
1983-84	427	554
1984-85	432	533
1985-86	435	509
1986-87	460	521
1987-88	443	476
1988-89	405	405

[1] Recurrent expenditure, less income from paid meals and from EC grants.
[2] Figures for earlier years have been converted to 1988-89 prices using the GDP (Market Prices) Deflator.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing which local authorities are providing sandwiches rather than a hot meal for children in families receiving income support.

Mr. Fallon: The information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the average price of a school meal in cash and real terms in each year since 1976 in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* special schools.

Mr. Fallon: The readily available information for primary schools is shown in the table. Information before 1979 is not readily available. Information was not collected centrally for secondary or special schools, nor for primary schools after 1988.

Average price for a primary school fixed charge meal

Year (October)	*Cash pence*	[1]*Real terms pence*
[2]1979	30	57
1980	43	67
1981	46	67
1982	50	68
1983	52	67
1984	55	68
1985	59	69
1986	61	69
1987	64	69
1988	65	65

[1] Figures for earlier years have been converted to 1988-89 prices using the GDP (Market Prices) Deflator.
[2] September.

Polytechnics

87. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list his detailed powers with respect to the financial conduct of a polytechnic.

Mr. Howarth: Generally, polytechnics are responsible for their own financial conduct. The powers of my right hon. and learned Friend in respect of the polytechnics and colleges sector are set out in the relevant provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988. Details of his financial relationship with the sector are in the financial memorandum between the Department and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Postgraduate Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the percentage of current postgraduate students in *(a)* the social sciences, *(b)* the arts, *(c)* applied sciences and *(d)* pure sciences who are British.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information on the nationality of students on postgraduate courses is not collected centrally.

Geomagnetism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on *(a)* the value of the work done for his Department on geomagnetism and *(b)* his assessment of the future research priority given to geomagnetism.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department supports work on geomagnetism through the Natural Environment Research Council at the Council's institutes—the British Geological Survey and British Antarctic Survey—and in higher education institutions, on the theory and past behaviour of the earth's geomagnetic field; on observing, monitoring and modelling activity of the contemporary geomagnetic field; and on the interactions of the earth's magnetic field with solar phenomena. The current value of NERC support for observation and monitoring of present-day geomagnetic activity is £201,000 per annum. The future priority to be given to NERC science budget support for geomagnetism research is a matter for NERC to consider against its other priorities.

Teachers (Indecency Convictions)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce legislation to require annual disclosure to parents of all convictions of offences involving indecency recorded against teachers in schools attended by their children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend does not plan to introduce such legislation. Applicants for teaching posts are already obliged to disclose any criminal convictions they have incurred to the prospective employer, and employers are able to check applicants' declarations by reference to police records. In addition, when a serving teacher is convicted of a criminal offence the police report the conviction both to the teacher's employer and to the Department.

Primary School Tests

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to permit parents to opt out of primary school tests for their children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Head teachers have a general duty under section 10 of the Education Reform Act 1988 to secure the implementation of the national curriculum in their schools and, consistently with that, must ensure that all pupils eligible for assessment are assessed. Pupils may be excepted only under the following exceptional circumstances.

(a) Where they have a statement of special educational needs which, in conformity with section 18 of the Act, provides for the disapplication or modification of the statutory assessment arrangements in whole or in part.

(b) In cases governed by regulations made by the Secretary of State under section 17 of the Act.

(c) Where a head teacher has made a direction under section 19 of the Act temporarily excepting a pupil from the assessment arrangements in whole or in part. The making of such exceptions is governed by the Education (National Curriculum) (Temporary Exceptions for Individual Pupils) Regulations 1989, and explained further in the accompanying circular 15/89. A parental request for an exception to be made based on the parent's own opposition to testing would not in itself constitute a sufficient ground for such a direction.

The duty to assess pupils under the Education Reform Act 1988 is not overridden by LEAs' duty under section 76 of the Education Act 1944 to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the principle that pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.

Art Psychotherapy

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has made to the Universities Funding Council to ensure that the courses in art therapy and group therapy offered by the art psychotherapy unit at Goldsmiths college, university of London, are properly funded for the academic years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Alan Howarth: These are issues for the college to decide within its aggregate resources. The Department has no role in such matters.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will acquire for his Department's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

Mr. Eggar: No, purchasing decisions are the responsibility of the Department's professional librarian.

Bird Report

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to complete his consideration of the issues raised by the Bird report about the right of institutions to award degrees, quality assurance provision and related matters.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. and learned Friend is making today.

Stirling University

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the actual cost incurred in building and equipping Stirling university; and what is the projected cost at present prices, adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Payments of capital grant allocated by the University Grants Committee between 1966 and 1985 for building and furnishing Stirling university, excluding student residential accommodation, were as follows:

Calendar year	*Grant* £	*1990 prices*[1] £
1966	429,848	3,592,232
1967	872,236	7,081,731
1968	551,366	4,295,279
1969	1,061,043	7,842,162
1970	1,261,529	8,683,080
1971	1,632,043	10,272,796
1972	969,380	5,641,655
1973	350,097	1,902,842
1974	168,276	796,026
1975	69,725	259,295
1976	180,563	583,010
1977	8,575	24,305
1978	35,118	89,391
1979	102,225	227,494
1980	17,211	32,053
1981	104,738	175,078
1982	484,445	752,584
1983	—	—
1984	153,125	216,098
1985	68,105	90,894

[1] 1990 prices have been calculated using the GDP deflator.

Asset Sales

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will bring forward proposals to permit local education authorities to reinvest 100 per cent. of capital receipts associated with the sale of assets used for educational purposes.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans at present to make changes in the debt redemption rules of the local authority capital finance system. Local education authorities are already permitted to reinvest up to 100 per cent. of capital receipts associated with the sale of land and buildings used for educational purposes in the acquisition of land or buildings for educational purposes in the same area.

SCOTLAND

Written Questions

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many written questions he or his predecessor answered in each year since 1980.

Mr. Lang: On a sessional basis, the number of written parliamentary questions answered from 1983-90 is set out in the table. Figures for 1980-82 are not available.

	Number
1983-84	3,200
1984-85	2,185
1985-86	2,316

	Number
1986-87	3,386
1987-88	4,982
1988-89	3,339
1989-90	2,985

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long on average the Scottish Office takes to reply to parliamentary written questions for *(a)* priority and *(b)* ordinary written answers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: On average, and if the information is readily to hand, my Department replies to priority written questions on the date they are due for answer and to ordinary written questions within one week.

Renfrewshire

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of central Government contribution to Renfrewshire Enterprise in the current financial year; and what criteria he has applied to its expenditure.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Following consideration of the business plan submitted by Renfrewshire Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise has decided to allocate a budget in 1991-92 of £28·834 million, inclusive of training allowances. Allocations to local enterprise companies, and the criteria used to determine them, are matters for Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make additional resources available to promote tourism within Renfrewshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish tourist board is happy to consider any applications from the Renfrewshire area for financial assistance towards the capital development of tourism projects. The promotion of tourism in Renfrewshire also benefits from the district council's membership of the Greater Glasgow tourist board, which receives financial support from STB.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what he anticipates will be the proportion of local authority income derived from *(a)* the poll tax/local tax, *(b)* non-domestic rates and *(c)* Government grants in Scotland in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Allan Stewart: For 1991-92, the expected proportions are:

	Per cent.
Community charge	[1]15
Non-domestic rates	24
Government grants	[2]61

[1] Gross figure—that is, before Community Charge Benefit and Community Charge Reduction Scheme assistance.
[2] Grants concerned are—Revenue Support Grant, specific grants and Community Charge Grant.

At this stage it is not possible to provide figures for future years.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what consultations took place with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the distribution of the accelerated revenue support grant payments given to local authorities as compensation for loss of community charge revenue;

(2) if he will list those local authorities which have received less compensatory income from the accelerated revenue support grants made than that lost in revenue from community charge income.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Provided that its assumptions about community charge collection prove correct, no local authority should lose income for 1991-92 as a result of the reduction in charges made by the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991. The combined income from revenue support grant, community charge grant and revised community charges should be equal to the total amount which each authority budgeted for originally in revenue support grant and community charge income.

My right hon. Friend announced on 18 April that, through a combination of revenue support grant and community charge grant, Scottish local authorities would receive by the end of June a total of £281 million more grant than they would have done under the normal arrangements for the payment of revenue support grant. This was broadly in line with the amount requested originally by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

In accordance with the past practice, each Scottish authority is being paid the same percentage amount of revenue support grant each week. Prior to its introduction this year, this arrangement was neither the subject of consultation with nor representation from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. But following recent representations from the convention and a small number of authorities, my right hon. Friend is considering the matter further.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, columns *614-16*, if he will provide the same information in real terms.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is detailed in the table and is derived directly from the figures given in the answer of 26 April. These have been converted to real terms and adjusted to 1990 prices using the GDP deflator.

Department of Energy R, D and D Expenditure on Renewable Energy (£ million)[1] (1990 prices)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Wind	1·3	1·4	1·5	3·8	3·7	6·6	7·1	4·8	4·9	4·4	5·1
Wave	6·3	5·9	7·3	4·8	1·5	0·6	0·5	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1
Geothermal Aquifers	2·7	3·0	4·3	2·3	2·6	1·5	0·4	0·1	—	0·1	0·2
Geothermal hot dry rocks	—	1·1	9·2	4·6	4·2	6·4	4·6	4·5	4·4	4·0	3·5
Solar	2·5	1·6	1·2	2·2	1·3	0·7	0·9	1·2	1·3	1·6	2·0

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
Biomass[2]	0·2	0·7	0·7	1·8	1·0	1·5	1·1	1·7	2·7	1·7	1·5
Tide	1·3	2·5	0·7	—	—	0·4	0·1	0·1	1·7	1·4	1·2
Hydro/general studies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·0	0·9	0·8
Technology Transfer and promotion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·9	1·1	1·7
ETSU services	2·9	3·9	3·8	3·1	2·8	2·9	2·6	3·0	2·8	2·8	2·9
	17·2	20·1	28·5	22·6	17·1	20·6	17·5	15·4	19·9	18·1	19·0
External contributions	1·5	1·6	3·1	4·9	2·9	4·6	2·8	4·0	4·8	5·3	5·6
Total	18·7	21·7	31·7	27·5	20·1	25·2	20·2	19·4	24·6	23·5	24·6

[1] Adjusted by implied GDP deflators based on expenditure data at factor cost.
[2] Includes expenditure on "waste as a fuel" projects under the energy efficiency office demonstration scheme.
Notes:
1 Where available external contributions include both private sector, generating boards and the European Commission.
2 Up to 1986-87 total for RED also includes expenditure on low head hydro and general studies to 1986-87. These are separately identified for 1987-88 and include work carried out by the chief scientist group ETSU.

Special Needs Training

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of training places provided under Government-funded schemes by the Scottish Association of Mental Health in the year ended 31 March 1991; and how many places are available in the current year 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information about the number of training places provided under Government-funded schemes by the Scottish Association for Mental Health in the year ended 31 March 1991 is not available. However, the number of employment training places contracted between that organisation and the Training Agency as at 20 August 1990 was for a maximum of 591 places. Dealings with the Scottish Association for Mental Health concerning the number of places for the current year, 1991-92, are a matter for individual local enterprise companies. I understand that information on the number of places contracted with individual training providers is not held centrally by Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average increase in Scottish electricity prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The average tariff increases announced by the two Scottish electricity companies and their predecessors in each of the last five years are shown in the table.

Average electricity tariff increase (per cent.)

	[1]1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Scottish Power	3·30	4·75	8·00	8·50	9·00
Scottish Hydro-Electric	3·00	4·70	8·00	8·50	9·00

[1] In 1987, the date of implementation was 1 September; in the subsequent years the increases were implemented with effect from 1 April in the relevant year.

Training Funds

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reinstate the funds available for training if the anticipated increase in contributions from the private sector does not materialise.

Mr. Lang: Decisions about the level of resources available for training through Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise were not based on assumptions about particular levels of contributions from the private sector. Responsibility for negotiating contracts with individual training providers which maximise the value obtained for public funds is a matter for local enterprise companies; and training providers will no doubt have assured themselves of the prospects of securing adequate employers' contributions before entering into the contracts. I understand that contracting between local enterprise companies and training providers for 1991-92 is largely completed.

Prisoners (Transfers)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many foreign nationals serving a sentence of imprisonment have been transferred to complete their sentence in their country of origin in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One prisoner was transferred to the United States of America in 1987 and one to Finland in 1988.

Prisoners (Drugs Offences)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females convicted or charged with a drug-related offence are currently imprisoned; if he will list their countries of origin; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the offences of the current prison population is not collected on a day-to-day basis. Nor is information collected on the country of origin of prisoners convicted of certain categories of offence.

Yearly breakdowns are, however, available of the offences of convicted prisoners received into prison. The number of direct receptions of prisoners convicted of drugs offences for two years 1989-90 was 613. Their average sentence length of 590 days, allowing for remission, suggests an average daily population of such prisoners of approximately 325. The inclusion of fine defaulters convicted of drugs offences might boost that figure to approximately 350. Information is not collected on the charges faced by remand prisoners.

Of the 40 foreign nationals in Scottish prisons on 15 May 1991, 14 were serving sentences for drug offences—

four from Pakistan, two each from Colombia and the Netherlands, and one each from Cyprus, Denmark, Guyana, Malta, Nigeria and Peru.

Prison Suicides

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners have brought about their own deaths in each of the past five years; and if he will list the prisoners and institutions, whether those who died were serving sentences or were on remand, their ages and whether inquiry reports are known.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is provided in the table except for the prisoners' or young offenders' names, which have been omitted out of consideration for their family and friends. If the hon. Member wishes these details I should be happy to write to him.

Fatal accident inquiries have been held in each case. The sheriffs' determinations are matters of public record.

Prison/Young Offenders Institution	*Sentenced*	*Remand*	*Age(s)*
1986			
Perth	2	—	22, 25
Edinburgh	—	1	18
Barlinnie	2	1	27, 50, 55
Cornton Vale	—	1	27
1987			
Edinburgh	—	1	26
Barlinnie	1	2	23, 29, 31
Dumfries	—	1	17
Glenochil	2	—	21, 34
1988			
Barlinnie	3	3	24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 49
Glenochil	1	—	27
1989			
Barlinnie	—	1	39
Shotts	2	—	22, 31
Aberdeen	—	1	59
Perth	1	—	26
Polmont	1	—	18
1990			
Barlinnie	2	1	25, 30, 39

Foreign Prisoners

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist for visits from relatives, including children, to foreign nationals in gaols; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Arrangements for visits by family members to foreign nationals in Scottish penal establishments are no different from arrangements for visits to other prisoners, except that governors make particular efforts to accommodate the needs of foreign nationals whose visitors may have travelled a great distance to see them. Foreign nationals may speak with their visitors in their own language.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals are serving a sentence or are on remand in a prison; and if he will list their countries of origin.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 15 May 1991 there were 40 foreign nationals in Scottish penal establishments. All were male. Thirty-six were serving sentences and four were on remand. Their countries of origin are given in the table.

Country of origin	*Sentenced*	*Remand*
Australia	2	—
Bangladesh	1	—
Canada	3	—
Colombia	2	—
Cyprus	1	—
Denmark	2	—
France	1	—
Guyana	1	—
Hong Kong	1	—
India	2	—
Ireland	4	—
Libya	1	—
Malta	1	—
Netherlands	2	—
Nigeria	2	1
Norway	1	—
Pakistan	6	3
Peru	1	—
United States of America	1	—
Yugoslavia	1	—
Total	36	4

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many foreign nationals imprisoned in gaols in Scotland are accompanied by dependent children.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration the Parole Board gives in its deliberations to the difficulties experienced by foreign nationals; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is entirely a matter for the Parole Board for Scotland, which is an independent

body with responsibility for exercising the functions conferred on it by section 18 of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many foreign nationals in gaols have dependants resident in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Such information is not available. Prisoners are under no obligation to divulge to the Secretary of State whether or not they have dependants or where they are resident.

Fatal Accident Inquiries

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether legal aid will be available to the close relatives of the deceased at fatal accident inquiries; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is open to close relatives of deceased at fatal accident inquiries to make application for legal aid to the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

Careers Service

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish comments from official bodies on the consultative document on the future of the careers service in Scotland and related review documents.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In accordance with usual practice, responses to the consultation document will be available to the public unless the writers of the responses request otherwise.

Prisoners (Deportations)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by country of origin for each of the last 10 years, the numbers of *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners in Scotland who were subsequently deported.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Scottish Bus Group

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the pension arrangements for employees of the Scottish Bus Group prior to the beginning of the current privatisation programme; and what steps he is taking to protect these pension arrangements in the post privatisation period.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Bus Group operates two pension schemes, the transport operatives pension scheme and the staff pension fund. The arrangements for pensions following privatisation are set out in the Scottish Bus Group disposal programme published on 6 February 1990, copies of which were made available to the House.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if bidders for Scottish Bus Group subsidiaries are required to include a minimum allocation of equity shares to employees in their bids.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. A 5 per cent. price preference is, however, available to bids involving the acquisition by the employees of a controlling interest in the companies being sold, provided that at least 25 per cent. of the ordinary shares will be owned by or on behalf of non-management employees.

Storm Damage

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what schemes are being considered to provide grants to individuals and local authorities in addition to the Bellwin scheme for the repair of severe storm damage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In May 1990, my Department issued a circular to all local authorities setting out the various sources of central Government funding available to them to offset expenditure arising out of an emergency. In addition to the Bellwin scheme, grant may be payable on emergency works carried out by authorities under the Coast Protection Act 1949 and on confirmed flood prevention schemes under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961.

The British Red Cross Society has recently assumed responsibility for the receipt and distribution of European Commission grant aid. This may be awarded at the European Commission's discretion to member states for the relief of families worst affected by abnormally severe weather conditions.

Inverary Bypass

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made to assess the economic viability of options for the proposed bypass at Inverary; when he expects to conclude consultations; when he expects to produce draft road orders; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Consultations with the principal landowner are currently being pursued. Subject to a satisfactory road alignment being agreed, it is the intention to ask the district council to safeguard this line. The scheme cannot command priority at present in the trunk road programme given the high returns available from competing projects of national importance. Further design work including detailed economic assessments will proceed only when there is a reasonable prospect of early funding being available. Present indications are that this is unlikely to be the case within the next five years.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the reasons that no advertising for the Scottish electricity privatisation has been placed in the Northern Ireland press or television; on what basis the level of advertising there was fixed; and what efforts have been made to contact investors in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The marketing activity for the flotation of the two Scottish electricity companies was planned to ensure that the target audiences were reached in a cost-effective manner. The decision not to advertise specifically in Northern Ireland was taken after consultation with our marketing and advertising advisers.

Everyone from Northern Ireland who applied for shares in the sale of the regional electricity companies in England and Wales has been sent information about the

Scottish flotations. Information packs have also been provided at branches of the Ulster bank, where prospectuses and application forms will be available early in June.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the future funding of further education colleges.

Mr. Lang: I have received a number of representations since I announced on 21 March the Government's intention to introduce legislation to transfer the funding of further education colleges from local to central Government from 1 April 1993. I have presented to Parliament today a White Paper, "Access and Opportunity" (Cm. 1530), which sets out our proposals in more detail.

Further education colleges are a key element in the Government's education and training policies. Our policies have achieved much over the last decade, including the reform of vocational qualifications and the creation of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies.

The White Paper builds on these achievements with further measures to stimulate participation and to improve opportunities and access. We propose to extend the training credit scheme to permit local enterprise companies to develop solutions to suit their areas taking account of the experience gained from the pilots that are presently under way. Local enterprise companies will be invited to submit bids for local schemes to operate training credits in their locality from April 1993. The aim will be to extend the coverage of training credits to include a further 10 per cent. of 16 and 17-year-olds leaving full-time education in Scotland. Our further aim is to extend credits progressively year by year to ensure that by 1996, within the lifetime of the next Parliament, every young person in Scotland who leaves full-time education will be able to have a training credit.

An important theme of the Government's education and training priorities has been the need to foster close links between employers and the education system. Local enterprise companies have already made it clear that improved links between education and business are one of their key objectives. The compact initiative, which currently operates in urban partnership areas, is a means of developing links between education and employment. It will be extended outwith the urban partnership areas.

Raising skills levels of the work force and of those qualifying with relevant and worthwhile qualifications is necessary if we are to match the skill of our economic competitors. The SCOTVEC system of vocational qualifications is now well established and is continuing to develop with the reforms of advanced courses and the recent introduction of Scottish vocational qualifications. SVQs are an important part of the system and are based upon competence to undertake a particular job. However, there is a need for a range of more broadly based qualifications to be developed. Accordingly, I will be inviting SCOTVEC to develop such qualifications within the SVQ framework. This will open up more opportunities for people to prepare themselves for a range of occupations and for entry to higher education.

As now, half the members of college councils will be employers, but in future councils will employ their own staff and control and manage assets. They will be given maximum freedom to be responsive to the needs of industry and students. In funding the colleges I will seek to achieve an appropriate balance between rewarding those colleges which perform better than others and achieving the financial stability necessary during a period of structural change.

The second White Paper, "Higher Education—a new framework", (Cm 1541), which I have also presented to Parliament today with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland will further enhance this policy. One of the Government's major achievements has been to secure sufficient places in higher education for the flow of young people who have the intellectual competence, motivation and maturity to benefit from it and who wish to do so. Our policies have helped to secure record levels of participation. Our higher education White Paper commits us to yet further expansion and increased access in higher education.

The policies set out in the White Papers will lead to a more skilful and prosperous Scotland. Taken together, they represent a major advance for tertiary education and training. The challenges that lie ahead are great. So are the opportunities.

A77

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much funding has been allocated to date on upgrading the A77; and if he will report on the progress of upgrading the A77.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Since 1979 two major improvements on the A77 have been completed at a cost of some £7 million. A further major improvement costing an estimated £4 million is currently under construction. Current plans for the Ayr road route—the proposed link between the M77 and the A77—envisage a start to construction of the trunk road section in line with progress by Strathclyde regional council on the construction of the Glasgow city section of this jointly funded scheme. Strathclyde regional council was given a supplementary capital allocation of £1·4 million in 1990-91 to enable it to bring forward work which would otherwise have had to be paid for in 1991-92 and thus free resources to allow a start to be made to the advance works of the local road section in 1991-92. The regional council was given a further addition of £1·6 million to its capital allocation for 1991-92 to encourage it to proceed with the project. These additions have created the opportunity for Strathclyde to advance the main works if it chooses. After completion of the Ayr road route, dualling of the remaining four-lane single carriageway section of the A77 between Glasgow and Ayr is planned. Four further improvement schemes on the route south of Ayr are also in course of preparation.

Local Enterprise Companies

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice and guidelines have been given to the local enterprise companies in respect of their obligations to provide employment training courses to those citizens who suffer from mental and/or physical handicaps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 15 May 1991]*: The Government aim to offer unemployed claimants with disabilities a place on employment training or in a job club, an enterprise allowance or a job interview guarantee. An offer of one of these options is guaranteed to unemployed claimants with disabilities who are aged between 18 and 24 and who have been unemployed for between six and 12 months. These priorities have been communicated to local enterprise companies and the conditions of their operating contracts require them to play their part in fulfilling the Government's aim and guarantee.

Any more general advice and guidelines to local enterprise companies concerning the mentally or physically handicapped would be a matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; and I have asked the chairmen of both bodies to write to the hon. Member.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Treason

33. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Attorney-General whether the law Commission is proposing to report on a codification of the law of treason.

The Attorney-General: The Law Commission is examining the whole of the criminal law, with a view to proposing a criminal code, and in that context will in due course examine the law of treason.

Serious Fraud Office

34. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the number of successful prosecutions brought by the Serious Fraud Office since its creation.

The Attorney-General: Fifty-one cases have been brought to trial in which 82 out of 120 defendants have been convicted.

Appeals

35. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the number of appeals he has made about sentences; and whether any further appeals are pending.

The Attorney-General: A total of 26 cases referred by me have been heard by the Court of Appeal, and a further two by the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland. In 24 of them a substantially heavier sentence has been substituted. Seven cases remain pending.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will acquire for his office's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

The Attorney-General: Many claims compete for the resources in present circumstances available for acquisitions by this library and I do not forsee the library purchasing the work to which the hon. Member refers.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Vietnam

38. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will establish a bilateral aid programme with Vietnam.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have no immediate plans to establish a direct aid programme to Vietnam, but we are keeping this question under review. Meanwhile we are providing financial support to British agencies for projects in Vietnam.

Bangladesh

41. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total aid, additional to previously planned aid, given to Bangladesh since 1 May.

Mrs. Chalker: Our response to the Bangladesh cyclone, bilaterally and through the European Community, now amounts to £7·85 million. All this is additional to our regular development aid to Bangladesh, which is running at about £50 million a year.

Baltic States

42. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with EC counterparts on technical aid to the Baltic states.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed technical asistance to the Soviet Union, including the Baltic states, at the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 March. The European Commission continues its exploratory contacts with the Soviet authorities. The Baltic states are eligible for assistance under the know-how fund for the Soviet Union.

Disaster Relief

43. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what moneys have been allocated for disaster relief for the years 1991-92.

Mrs Chalker: The initial provision for humanitarian aid in ODA's main supply estimates for 1991-92 is £75 million. This has been increased by the £30 million of new assistance announced on 29 April.

Brazil

44. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the visit to Brazil by the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mrs. Chalker: My second visit provided an important opportunity to see the environmental projects under our bilateral programme and to discuss further cooperation with key Brazilian Ministers, scientists and institutions. Together with the Minister for the Environment and Countryside I attended the special environment seminar hosted by President Collor and HRH the Prince of Wales. This is helping to advance preparations for the United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio in 1992.

African Countries (Aid)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what long-term aid and advice on growing food is being given to the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and other African countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: British aid is currently supporting the following projects related to food production in sub-Saharan Africa: this includes the livestock sector but excludes our involvement in cash crops for export.

Ethiopia

Teff Research: To produce improved strain of this indigenous cereal crop.

Sidamo Rangelands: improved food security on sustainable basis for 10 communities in Sidamo Province.

Koisha Rural Development: to increase food production and strengthen local economy.

Western Haraghe: introduction of sustainable system of land use.

Dairy Goat Project: to encourage ownership and improve productivity in the Highlands.

Farmers Research Project: assistance to NGOs working with communities in North Omo region.

Under Joint Funding Scheme co-financing 4 agricultural projects being run or supported by British NGOs.

Sudan and Somalia

For political, economic and security reasons, long-term, bilateral development assistance to Somalia and Sudan has been suspended, although in Sudan we are co-financing under the joint funding scheme three agriculture projects run or supported by British NGOs. We are also continuing to provide humanitarian aid, and to honour commitments to Sudanese and Somalis in this country on technical co-operation training awards.

Botswana

Technical Assistance: Eight Veterinary Officers concerned with Beef production, one Agricultural Economist, three Research Officers.

Cameroon

Technical assistance to agricultural research in co-operation with the World bank.

Gambia

Agricultural development project: research into effects of trypanosomiasis on different breeds of cattle.

Technical Assistance to develop seed multiplication unit (recently completed).

Ivory Coast

Seed multiplication project in conjunction with the Commonwealth Development Corporation (recently completed).

Kenya

Rehabilitation of South Nyanza Sugar Company (Sony).

Agricultural Information Centre: to reinforce work of Extension Services, training and dissemination of information to farmers.

Kenya Trypanosomasis Research Institute (KETRI) research into tsetse fly and improve livestock production.

To increase control of rinderpest like diseases in Kenya, through improved diagnosis surveillance, immunisation and understanding of their epidemiology.

Crop Protection Research strengthening within the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute (KARI).

Agricultural Development Corporation: to improve the efficiency of the ADC.

Lesotho

Provision of Livestock Adviser and Agricultural Adviser.

Malawi

Likoma/Chizimulu Artisanal Fisheries Development Project.

Livestock Disease Evaluation Project.

Lake Malawi Fisheries Project: provision of expertise, equipment and a vessel to assess the potential for expansion of fisheries development activities on the lake.

Mauritius

Farmers Service Centre Project: to provide expert technical advice for small sugar planters including advice on crop diversification.

Mozambique

Rehabilitation of Namarroi district: support of agricultural extension training, rehabilitation of roads, small industry and construction of grinding mills, wells and springs.

Agriculture and Soil Conservation Programme, Nampula City: Gully stabilisation and plot protection, and supply of trees for fuelwood and cultivation.

Support for small farmers and co-operatives, Zona Verdes, Maputo: Provision of pesticides, equipment, seeds etc, and advice on marketing, finance and planning.

Nigeria

Agricultural training for technicians and farm managers.

Sierra Leone

Agricultural Extension Training Project at certificate training centres (CTC), Njala University College: Support to construction and staffing of the centre.

Swaziland

Provision of three Veterinary Officers concerned with livestock.

Tanzania

Goats Extension Project: improving goat husbandry.

Fisheries Development Project at Lindi/Mtwara.

National Agriculture and Livestock Research Project: to improve efficiency and productivity of RNR sector.

West Kilimanjaro Dairy Farm Project; to raise milk output and improve quality of dairy cattle.

Tengeru Agricultural and Livestock Tutors Training Centre Project: to improve training skills of staff responsible for training extension workers and farmers.

University Support Programme in training for agricultural engineers.

Livestock adviser to Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

Zambia

Adaptive Research in support of the development of Tsetse control Technology in Africa.

Zimbabwe

DDT Monitoring: effects of DDT on land.

Assistance to Meteorological Department for agricultural planning.

Communal Land Soil Surveying (Provision of expert).

Insect Pest Management Initiative: Tsetse control.

Africa General

Migrant Pest: research to reduce crop losses caused by migrant pests. (Various locations).

Assistance to International Red Locust Control Organisation for Central and Southern Africa (IRLCOSA): provision of flight maintenance equipment and funding of pilot training.

Assistance to Desert Locust Control Organisation for Eastern Africa: provision of Operations Adviser and a Pilot.

Technical Assistance to Pan-Africa Rinderpest Campaign.

Additionally, under the joint funding scheme, we are co-financing almost 80 long-term agricultural development projects being run or supported by British non-governmental organisations in sub-Saharan Africa other than Sudan and Ethiopia.

We are also strengthening Africa capacity via numerous training awards tenable in this country: a total of 59 such awards in the fields of agricultural development and food production are currently held by nationals from Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

EMPLOYMENT

Geomagnetism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he has taken in relation to the geomagnetic survey since the answer of his predecessor as Secretary of State for Energy of 15 May 1989, *Official Report*, column 3.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 14 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *124*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health and Social Security Bodies

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has anything to add to his reply of 1 May in respect of the original nominating person or body of those appointed to serve on health and social security boards and health and social security area councils.

Mr. Hanley: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave on 1 May, column *199*, except that it should be noted that I am still waiting for names from certain of the bodies that might be expected to nominate candidates for the health and social service councils.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the primary schools in Southern education and library board area which inherited a financial deficit on entering LMS, indicating the amount of such deficit for each school.

Dr. Mawhinney: The schools which overspent under the Southern education and library board's 1990-91 consolidated school allowance scheme and the amounts are as follows:

Primary School	*Amount overspent at 31 March 1991*
Controlled	£
Abercorn	726·97
Aghavilly	1,068·94
Annaghmore (Portadown)	11·10
Armstrong	3,304·35
Augher Central	14·73
Ballydown	392·58
Ballygawley	260·57
Ballynenagh	118·94
Ballyroney	212·89
Benburb	41·98
Bessbrook	351·09
Cabra (Tandragee)	142·68
Carntall	105·40
Carrick (Lurgan)	565·84
Churchtown	148·43
Clare	56·21
Clogher Regional	486·88
Closkelt	29·01
Coagh	357·97
Coalisland	221·45
Craigavon	13·87
Croreagh	76·55
Dickson (Lurgan)	860·19
Donaghmore (Dungannon)	362·41
Donaghmore (Newry)	12·58
Dromore Central	1,642·08
Drumgor	391·48
Drumsallen	299·81
Dungannon	631·96
Edendale	162·84
Edenderry (Banbridge)	917·52
Foley	136·01
Glaskermore	392·82
Gransha	246·42
Hart Memorial	1,260·36
Innishmagh	212·72
Killylea	418·85
Killyman	931·60
Kinallen	666·14
Kinnego	147·59
Lisdrumchor	26·22
Lisfearty	705·99
Lisnadill	412·60
Lisnagleer	205·02
Loughbrickland (No. 2)	981·54
Lurgan Model	147·31
Maralin Village	857·28
Markethill	167·15
Millington	187·94
Milltown	269·84
Minterburn	244·45
Mountnorris	182·43
Moyallon	247·49
Moy Regional	142·41
Newmills	332·63
Newry Model	96·79
Orritor	143·45
Salter's Grange	508·36
Shinn	148·27
Stewartstown	170·63
Tandragee	564·18
The Cope	145·81
Tullaghoge	662·92
Tullygally	2,932·56
Walker Memorial	185·15
Waringstown	2,040·98
Windsor Hill	659·88
Maintained	
All Saints (Ballela)	385·10
Anamar	168·85
Armagh Christian Brothers	306·66
Aughadarragh	811·38
Ballylifford	532·17
Carrick (Warrenpoint)	1,199·53
Carrickrovaddy	35·90
Castlecaulfield	90·60
Clay	510·97
Clintyclay	27·56
Clonalig	178·12
Clontifleece	194·04
Crowhill	112·19
Derrychrin	852·66
Derrylatinee	840·72
Drelincourt	222·54
Drumintee	50·76
Edendork	2,934·05
Eglish (Portadown)	486·04
Grange (Kilkeel)	781·46
Holy Cross (Attical)	371·34
Jonesborough	822·64
Killean	239·27
Laghey	998·54
Lissummon	256·04
Loughgall	627·91
Loup	892·39
Lurgancahone	127·95
Middletown Boys'	325·57
Mount St. Catherine's	2,083·37
Our Lady's (Carrickaduff)	697·19
Presentation Convent (Portadown)	90·39
Primate Dixon Memorial Boys'	2,792·92
Primate Dixon Memorial Girls'	500·27

Primary School	Amount overspent at 31 March 1991 £
Controlled	
Roan	938·09
Rock	1,083·91
Rostrevor Convent of Mercy	280·69
Star of the Sea (Lisnacree)	520·90
Star of the Sea (Warrenpoint)	1,385·40
St. Anthony's	273·13
St. Brendan's	7,407·22
St. Brigid's (Augher)	167·43
St. Brigid's (Drumilly)	4,467·57
St. Brigid's (Glassdrummond)	134·66
St. Brigid's (Mountjoy)	65·64
St. Clare's (Keady)	450·17
St. Clare's Convent (Newry)	4,072·82
St. Colman's Abbey (Newry)	2,559·86
St. Colman's (Annaclone)	1,333·12
St. Colman's (Dromore)	113·03
St. Colman's Boys' (Kilheel)	401·68
St. Colmcille's (Armagh)	293·86
St. James' (Tandragee)	53·49
St. Jarlath's	419·24
St. John's (Kingsisland)	418·10
St. John's (Moy)	33·40
St. Joseph's Junior (Lurgan)	1,581·75
St. Joseph's (Ballymartin)	411·73
St. Joseph's (Bessbrook)	1,277·38
St. Joseph's (Galbally)	229·83
St. Joseph's (Killeenan)	922·08
St. Joseph's (Meigh)	1,016·98
St. Joseph's (Poyntzpass)	1,134·96
St. Lawrence's (Belleeks)	373·17
St. Louis' (Middletown)	395·10
St. Malachy's (Balymoyer)	148·2
St. Malachy's (Carnagat)	4,517·71
St. Malachy's (Drummullan)	672·38
St. Malachy's (Glencull)	169·88
St. Mary's Boys' (Cookstown)	1,217·34
St. Mary's (Aughnacloy)	1,506·53
St. Mary's (Ballygawley)	324·18
St. Mary's (Banbridge)	1,132·42
St. Mary's (Barr)	33·86
St. Mary's (Cabra)	879·56
St. Mary's (Dunamore)	2,009·81
St. Mary's (Fivemiletown)	77·69
St. Mary's (Granemore)	522·04
St. Mary's (Lisbuoy)	798·49
St. Mary's (Maghery)	419·24
St. Mary's (Mullabawn)	1,007·93
St. Mary's (Pomeroy)	219·01
St. Mary's (Rathfriland)	1,015·51
St. Mary's (Stewartstown)	2,416·00
St. Michael's (Clady)	741·42
St. Michael's (Finnis)	598·41
St. Michael's (Newtownhamilton)	420·20
St. Oliver Plunkett's (Forkhill)	316·90
St. Patrick's Monastry (Dungannon)	2,388·17
St. Patrick's (Annaghmore)	655·38
St. Patrick's (Armagh)	2,309·08
St. Patrick's (Ballymaghery)	885·56
St. Patrick's (Crossmaglen)	1,730·30
St. Patrick's (Cullyhanna)	915·27
St. Patrick's (Donaghmore)	10·89
St. Patrick's (Maralin)	58·03
St. Patrick's (Mayobridge)	1,696·31
St. Patrick's (Moneymore)	428·09
St. Patrick's (Mullinahoe)	1,118·66
St. Patrick's (Newry)	2,929·81
St. Peter's Boys (Warrenpoint)	343·96
St. Peter's (Cloughreagh)	783·30
St. Peter's (Lurgan)	1,498·86
St. Peter's (Moortown)	822·71
St. Teresa's (Lurgan)	908·57
Tannaghmore	386·32
Tullyherron	1·78
Tullymore	651·38

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what provisions have been made to ensure that accumulated funds from pension schemes in Northern Ireland Electricity will not be lost to Northern Ireland Electricity employees;

(2) whether he will make it his policy to require a guarantee that, as a condition of sale, pension terms currently operative in Northern Ireland Electricity will be honoured subsequent to privatisation.

Mr. Needham: In line with provisions which were contained in the Electricity Act 1989, the proposed Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order will allow regulations to be made which will ensure that privatisation does not adversely affect the benefits payable to members and pensioners in the NIE pension scheme at the point of transfer.

Millisle Tourist Project

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Royal Ulster Constabulary will provide any foot patrols in Millisle during the forthcoming summer holiday season.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand that foot patrols operate all year round in Millisle.

Race Relations Act

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about extending the Race Relations Act to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Foyle on 27 February, *Official Report*, Vol. 186, columns *515-16*. Only the Northern Ireland standing advisory commission on human rights has made representations to me on this matter.

Prison Rule 25

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *475*, for what reason Gerald Clarke was removed from association with other prisoners at Crumlin Road gaol under prison rule 25 (Northern Ireland) 1982; what type of confinement and association he is now receiving; whether he is still on hunger strike; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Gerald Clarke was removed from association with other prisoners under prison rule 25 (Northern Ireland) 1982 as there was concern for his personal safety. He resumed eating prison food on 25 April and after being declared fit by prison medical staff the prisoner was returned to ordinary location on a wing with other untried prisoners.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts,

by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The information could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. However, the available data in respect of the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office are as follows:

	Staff in post on 1 April												
Grade	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Statistical Posts													
Assistant Secretary Economist	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1
Chief Agricultural Economist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Director of Research and Information	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Deputy Chief Agricultural Economist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Senior Principal Economist	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
Principal Agricultural Economist	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Principal Scientific Officer	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3
Principal Economist	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	3	9	7	10	12
Principal Research Officer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—
Senior Agricultural Economist	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5
Deputy Economist	1	1	2	1	4	2	3	2	3	9	13·5	15·5	15·5
Senior Scientific Officer	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	1
Senior Research Officer	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scientific Officer	6	6	6	6	7	8	7	7	8	9	9	7	9
Senior Assistant Economist	—	—	—	2	1	2	1	2	1	18	20	19	16
Higher Scientific Officer	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	3	3	2	3
Agricultural Economist	4	4	6	6	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5
Assistant Economist	3	3	2	2	3	6	5	7	8	3	2	3	6
Agricultural Inspector Grade III/IV	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Agricultural Inspector Group 4	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4
Inspector Group 3	2	2	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Agricultural Inspector Group 2	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Assistant Agricultural Economist	2	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Assistant Scientific Officer	5	4	5	5	3	4	4	1	2	1	1	2	2
Sandwich Course Student	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Administrative Posts													
Principal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Deputy Principal	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	4
Staff Officer	5	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6
Executive Officer I	9	10	11	11	12	12	11	13	11	13	12	13	12
Executive Officer II	15	16	15	14	24	23	22	21	22	23	27	26	28
Administrative Officer	47	47	43	43	54	41	42	46	54	61	59	65	66
Administrative Assistant	26	26	28	25	22	35	34	31	32	32	31	33	34
Personal Secretary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1

School Transport

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many drivers are employed on early afternoon transport in each education board area; and what is the total number of hours early afternoon driving for each board area;

(2) how many schools received early afternoon transport for primary 1 and primary 2 students, in each education board area in each year since 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Education and Library Board	*Number of drivers*	*Hours per day*
North-Eastern	20	20
South-Eastern	25	25
Southern	56	56

Number of schools receiving early afternoon transport

Education and Library Board	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
North-Eastern	19	19	19	19	19	19
South-Eastern	24	24	24	24	25	25
Southern	49	49	49	50	52	52

The Belfast and Western education and library boards do not provide early afternoon transport.

Lay Visitors

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the 41 lay visitors who are permitted to visit non-paramilitary suspects detained in Royal Ulster Constabulary holding centres in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* No. Lay visitors are appointed by the police authority and I understand that it does not propose to disclose their names.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Residential Homes

14. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next expects to meet Age Concern to discuss problems which arise for persons in residential homes who have difficulty in meeting the difference between income support and the actual cost of places.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Age Concern last Monday.

Young Persons (Income Support)

16. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review his Department's policy on 16 and 17-year-olds' entitlement to income support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Government's policy is to offer 16 and 17-year-olds the positive options of education, entering employment, or taking up the Government's guarantee of quality training through youth training. But income support is still available to those vulnerable groups of young people who are unable to participate in YT or those seeking a YT place who would otherwise suffer severe hardship.

Child Support Agency

17. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what long-term savings he expects to make as a result of the operation of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Poor Families

18. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the latest measures to improve the living standards of families living in poverty in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: Our reformed social security system enables us to concentrate help, over and above maintaining the real value of benefits, wherever it will do most good. That is why, for example, from this October, families with children will have seen the real value of their income-related benefits increase by £0·5 billion a year compared with the position before the reforms.

Arcola Street Office

19. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next plans to visit Arcola street social security office to discuss the operations of the office.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Social Fund

20. **Sir William Shelton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of converting all social fund loans to grants.

Mr. Scott: As at 31 March 1991 the accumulated net cost of outstanding loans over the lifetime of the fund stands at £142 million. This is the difference between gross loans expenditure up to 31 March and recoveries repaid at that date. This represents the cost to the taxpayer of writing off all current loan debt.

21. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the social fund budgets for Finsbury Park and Highgate offices for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr Scott: Information concerning the social fund budgets of particular offices is in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the net Treasury input to the social fund has been each year since its inception and in the current year.

Mr. Scott: Social fund net expenditure is as follows:

Year	*£m*
1988-89	152
1989-90	131
1990-91	[1]156
1991-92	[2]161

[1] The figure quoted for 1990-91 is provisional.
[2] The figure quoted for 1991-92 is the estimated net provision.

National Insurance

22. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the revenue which would arise from the removal of the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Scott: If the ceiling for employees and self-employed national insurance contributions were abolished, it is currently estimated that contribution yield would increase in a full year by £2·5 billion and £0·5 billion respectively. Based on 1990-91 figures it is estimated that some 3·4 million employees and 0·5 million self-employed people would pay more in contributions.

Refugees

23. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if any additional resources are being made available to London offices to deal with the number of refugees arriving in London.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes. The staffing position is always kept under review. Additional staff are added to offices with high numbers of refugee claims. Area reserve staff are also available to assist district offices. In Newham district, the office has eight staff more than their calculated staff resources based on workload data and has received extensive help from the area reserve staff.

Child Benefit

24. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the impact of the change in single-parent benefit on child benefit.

Mr. Jack: One-parent benefit is paid as an addition to child benefit for anyone bringing up a child alone. Its structure has not changed since the introduction of child benefit.

Pensioners

25. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners own their own homes; and what assessment he has made of how this is likely to change over the next 20 years.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice).

28. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners have some form of private income to top up the state pension and benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss).

Lone Parents

26. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the latest available figures showing the proportion of lone parents who receive maintenance.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

Invalid Care Allowance

27. **Sir Marcus Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have benefited from increases in the earnings disregard in invalid care allowance in the last two years.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) earlier today.

Young Persons (Benefits)

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the MORI research commissioned by his Department into benefit provision for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Jack: The cost of the MORI research was £120,000.

Long-stay Hospital Patients

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the treatment of long-stay hospital patients in receipt of income support with respect to mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Scott: Income support help with mortgage interest could continue for up to 52 weeks in such circumstances. This is in line with the rules for others on housing benefit or income support who are temporarily absent from their homes. It would not be right to use public funds to subsidise empty housing indefinitely.

Claimants, Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of appeals heard in his Department's Blyth Valley areas decided by tribunals concerning *(a)* income support, *(b)* mobility allowance, *(c)* attendance allowance, *(d)* injury and disablement benefit, *(e)* invalidity benefit and *(f)* non income related benefits in 1989 and 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available statistics relating to social security appeal tribunals are for the period ending 30 June 1990. National administrative statistics for appeal tribunals are not available for areas smaller than a former social security region. The relevant information for the former north-eastern region is in the table.

Total Number of Social Security Appeals heard and decided

	North Eastern Region	
	Year ending 31 December 1989	*Half year ending 30 June 1990*
Income Support	4,182	2,176
Mobility Allowance	214	117
Attendance Allowance	23	15
Disablement Benefit	459	274
Invalidity Benefit	1,418	735
Child Benefit	233	147
Invalid Care Allowance	73	37
Maternity Allowance	16	12
Retirement Pension	167	102
Severe Disablement Allowance	26	15
Unemployment Benefit	2,787	1,112
Widows Benefit	115	48

Next Steps

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: The agencies currently established within the Department are:

The Benefits Agency, established in April 1991;
The Contributions Agency, established in April 1991;
The Information Technology Services Agency, established in April 1990;
The Resettlement Agency, established in May 1989.

We plan to establish the Child Support Agency in early 1993.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated numbers of severely disabled people who will meet the present criteria set out by the independent living fund for each of the next five years.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible to estimate the numbers of people who will all meet the criteria set by the trustees for receiving help from the ILF.

The number of people receiving help from the ILF at the end of March 1989 was 890. The number at the end of March 1990 was 4,262; and 7,724 at the end of March 1991.

Pensioners

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *486*, whether the weekly incomes on which the figures are based include or exclude *(a)* SERPS and *(b)* means-tested benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: The table in the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham on 29 January at column *486* shows the number of married couple pensioners and the number of single pensioners with incomes in excess of basic state retirement pensions, net additional (SERPS) pension and graduated pension plus supplementary pensions, but not housing benefit.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the answer given to the then hon. Member for Kensington on 14 July 1987, *Official Report*, column *451*, showing the number of pensioners with gross weekly incomes other than the state basic pension of up to £5, £5 to £10, £10 to £15, £15 to £20, £20 to £30, £30 to £40, £40 to £50, £50 to £60, £60 to £70, £70 to £80, £80 to £90, £90 to £100, £100 to £110, £110 to £120, £120 to £130, £130 to £140, £140 to £150, £150 to £200, £250 to £300, £300 to £400, £400 to £500 and over £500, distinguishing between single and married pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table.

	Numbers (thousands)	
	Married	*Single*
Up to £5	130	610
£5 to £10	110	360
£10 to £15	120	450
£15 to £20	150	480
£20 to £30	330	990
£30 to £40	230	450
£40 to £50	180	220
£50 to £60	130	160
£60 to £70	120	110
£70 to £80	110	80
£80 to £90	120	100
£90 to £100	70	80
£100 to £110	50	60
£110 to £130	110	70
£130 to £150	100	50
£150 to £200	120	70
£200 and over	280	120

Note: The figures show respectively thousands of pensioner married couples and single pensioners. The income bands have been aggregated in some cases to provide a statistically adequate sample.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1987.

DEFENCE

RAF Caerwent

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether projectile ammunition is stored at RAF Caerwent;

(2) if he will list the movements by road or rail of ammunition and weapons to and from RAF Caerwent in each of the last 12 months;

(3) if he will list the types of ammunition and weapons and their tonnages currently stored at RAF Caerwent.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 9 May 1988 at column *1*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of the safeguarded areas around the perimeter of RAF Caerwent in which his Department has in the past sought restrictions on planning applications for new developments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Copies of the Ministry of Defence (Caerwent) Explosives Storage Area Direction 1988 are held by those local planning authorities whose areas are affected by it. The direction is freely accessible to the public via those authorities. I have, however, placed copies in the Library of the House.

The Gulf

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the approximate number of battle casualty reinforcements attached to the 1 Armoured Division during Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our policy to give details of operational contingency plans.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the operational ability of those forces deployed with RAF Germany which were not deployed to the Gulf declined or increased during the course of Operation Granby;

(2) whether the supply of spare parts for Tornado and Jaguar aircraft and Puma and Chinook helicopters deployed with the RAF in Germany altered as a result of the deployment of RAF forces to the Gulf as part of Operation Granby;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 28 November 1990 to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), what was the approximate degree of the adverse effect on BAOR forces that remained in Germany during Operation Granby resulting from the decision to deploy the 1 Armoured Division to the Gulf;

(4) pursuant to his answer of 28 November 1990 to the hon. Member for Rhondda, what was the approximate degree of the consequential effects on the spares position in BAOR resulting from the deployment of 1 Armoured Division to the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Army and RAF units which deployed on Operation Granby were given priority in terms of equipment, including spares, and personnel. This had some effect on the operational availablility or readiness of forces which remained in Germany and on certain spares holdings, but it is not our practice to comment in detail on such matters.

Defence Equipment Exports

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the financial effect on his equipment procurement budget of the export of British defence equipment.

Mr. Alan Clark: Where the export of British defence equipment enables United Kingdom companies to spread the cost of their overheads, it reduces the cost of equipment to my Department. However, it is not possible accurately to quantify this effect. In addition, the

Department benefits from receipts from commercial exploitation levies paid on exports of defence equipment whose development the Department funded.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now change his policy regarding the release of information on the export of non-lethal British defence equipment to *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* the rest of the world.

Mr. Alan Clark: I see no reason to do so.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report*, column *292*, whether in the last 12 months he has provided any non-governmental organisation or individual with details of the contents of the long-term costing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 2 May, at column *292*.

United Nations Military Staff Committee

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, columns *570-1*, what is the service rank of the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations military staff committee and the amount and type of administrative support provided to the United Kingdom representative; and whether he has submitted any documents for consideration by the committee in the last four years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The head of the British defence staff, which is a major general level appointment, acts as the head of the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations military staff committee. Administrative support for the United Kingdom delegation is provided by members of the British defence staff, Washington. No papers have been submitted to the military staff committee by the United Kingdom delegation in the last four years.

HMS Fearless and Intrepid (Replacement)

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in defining and designing replacement assault ships for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed on 25 July 1990 that we intend to retain an amphibious capability. We are considering how best to maintain in the longer term the capability currently provided by the assault ships HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will acquire for his Department's library a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence library has one copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger" on order.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of funds provided to help drug misusers is being given to those addicted to benzodiazepines.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Doctors and Dentists (Pay)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions during the last 12 years the recommendations of the review board have not been implemented in respect of the salaries of doctors and dentists; and what is his estimate of the cumulative shortfall resulting from variation of, or delays in, implementation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have implemented in full the recommendations of the review body on doctors' and dentists' remuneration except in 1981, when the award was abated, and in 1989 and 1990 when two recommendations were rejected in each year. The 1981 abatement was restored at the start of 1984. Implementation of the award has been staged or deferred in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1990 and 1991, but in all cases the awards were or will be in full payment by the end of the financial year to which they related.

By the time this year's awards are in full payment from 1 December, doctors' and dentists' pay will have increased by 37·4 per cent. in real terms since 1978, a rate of increase well above that of most other groups in the public and private sectors.

Health Authority Reports

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the cost of producing annual reports of the local health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Braille Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for the reductions in the Braille grant last year to the Royal National Institute for the Blind; and when he expects to make a statement concerning the future level of grant.

Mr. Dorrell: We have funded the Royal National Institute for the Blind's braille service for many years. In the light of RNIB's comparatively strong financial position, the scope for it to generate alternative sources of income for the braille service and the very pressing demands on the limited available funds, we decided that we could no longer justify the generous level of grant which RNIB had previously received. Accordingly we advised it that its grant of £250,000 would be reduced by £50,000 in 1990-91 and that the situation would be reviewed in 1991-92. We have now awarded a grant of £200,000 a year for three years starting on 1 April 1991 and will review the situation again when the grant expires.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions have taken place between his department and office bearers of the Royal National Institute for the Blind in connection with the funding of Braille publications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the Royal National Institute for the Blind on 26 March following two earlier meetings with my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. As well as a very full discussion about the Braille grant we discussed other funding possibilities and have subsequently invited RNIB to submit a funding proposal for a community care project.

HIV Virus and AIDS

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total planned expenditure into research by Her Majesty's Government relating to the HIV virus and AIDS; and what is the planned total for the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on 19 March 1991 at columns *85-86*.

The Government make available earmarked funds to regional health authorities as a contribution towards the costs incurred in helping prevent the spread of HIV infection and providing treatment, counselling and support for those affected by HIV and AIDS. Since 1985 over £500 million has been made available in this way. Regional and district health authorities have discretion to use these funds for research purposes, but there is no central record kept of the amounts spent or planned to be spent.

Northumberland Area Services

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average general practitioner list size for the Northumberland family health services authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 1 October 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, the average general practitioner list size in the Northumberland family health services authority's area was 1,773.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the average unit cost of bed spaces in Northumberland in *(a)* Northumberland local authority, *(b)* private care homes, *(c)* private nursing homes and *(d)* voluntary homes for elderly persons.

Mr. Dorrell: The 1990-91 estimates published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy give the gross cost per place filled in Northumberland's own homes for elderly people, excluding capital charges, as £163 per resident per week. Information on the costs of private and voluntary homes is not held centrally.

Hospital Waste

Mr Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much funding has been given to health authorities to update their existing waste incinerators since 1987; and how much of that has been given to Leicestershire health authority;

(2) how many waste incinerators, for disposing of contaminated waste from hospitals, are currently in use in England and Wales; and what information he has on how much it costs to run them each year;

(3) how many hospital waste incinerators are classified as out of date in England and Wales; and what estimate has been made of how much it will cost to upgrade them to new Environmental Protection Act 1990 standards;

(4) what information he has on how many health authorities in England and Wales are preparing to send hospital waste to Germany to be changed to safe fuel before returning it to Britain to be disposed of.

Mr. Dorrell: Financial provision for the disposal of clinical waste is subsumed within overall annual allocations to health authorities. There are approximately 600 NHS-owned incinerators in England. Their running costs, maintenance, upgrading and any plans for replacement are a matter for individual health authorities.

A "Strategic Guide for Waste Management" was issued to health authorities/NHS trusts in March 1991 (ELM(a1)M/1), a copy of which is available in the Library. It included guidance on meeting incinerator standards required by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and arising from relinquishment of NHS Crown immunity on 1 April 1991. It recommended that health authorities/NHS trusts examine a wide range of options for future clinical waste disposal of which wholly NHS owned and operated incinerators is only one. Decisions remain the province of individual health authorities/NHS Trusts.

We are not aware of any proposals to send clinical waste to Germany for reprocessing.

South Yorkshire Ambulance Service

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received during the last six months from residents in South Yorkshire expressing support for the transfer of the South Yorkshire ambulance service to trust status.

Mrs Virginia Bottomley: The application from the South Yorkshire ambulance service will be subject to a statutory period of public consultation conducted by Yorkshire regional health authority for a three-month period commencing 13 May 1991.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what salaries are currently paid to those officials within the national health service who are in charge of the ambulance service and their respective areas, including the chief ambulance officer of the South Yorkshire ambulance service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally and details of payments awarded to individual NHS employees are a confidential matter between employer and employee. I understand that most officers in charge of ambulance services are employed on NHS senior manager terms. Senior managers are on performance-linked contracts and paid a flat rate salary on a 30-point pay spine. The spine ranges from £13,560 to £42,290 per annum.

Elderly People

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department is proposing to take action to respond to the European Parliament resolution B-1537/90 which calls on member state Governments to realise the needs of elderly people and make proper provision for them.

Mr. Dorrell: We have noted the terms of the motion for a resolution. It is for the Parliament to decide whether it wishes to refer the issue to the Commission.

The Government are promoting a wide range of measures to develop services for older people. In doing so, we encourage the involvement of the voluntary sector and of older people themselves wherever possible.

Following agreement on the decision of the Council of the European Communities on actions for the elderly, the United Kingdom intends to play a full part both in the programme of activities and in the European Year of the Elderly in 1993.

Ambulance Service Trusts

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to national health service trusts on the salaries and fringe benefits to be paid to those who are the principal directors of the ambulance services which have become trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Non-executive directors of NHS trusts are remunerated at a rate of £5,000 per annum. Remuneration for executive directors of NHS trusts is a matter for the trust board.

Disposable Needles

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has completed his discussions about supplying, on prescription, disposable needles to diabetics using pen type insulin injectors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The discussions with suppliers referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend on 18 December 1990, at column *155*, are continuing.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the report of the independent experts set up in March 1990 to investigate whether the emission of toxic gases from fungal growth on cot mattresses could be a cause of cot deaths; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The report of the working group of independent experts set up by the chief medical officer will be published shortly.

Hornsey Centre for Children Learning

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his medical advisers visited the Hornsey centre for children learning; and what his policy is in publishing advice from medical advisers in relation to such centres.

Mr. Dorrell: The most recent visit was on 9 April. Reports on such visits are confidential to the institution visited and the Departments concerned.

Midwives

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives were working in the national health service in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available; and what has been the trend in perinatal and maternal mortality rates since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There were 19,2000 whole-time equivalent qualified midwives working in the hospital and community health service in England at 30 September 1989. The equivalent figure for 1979 was nearly 4,000 lower at 15,500.

The perinatal and maternal mortality rates have both fallen further since 1979.

The perinatal mortality rate has fallen from 14·6 to 8·1 per 1,000 total births and the maternal mortality rate has fallen from 0·11 to 0·09 per 1,000 total births.

Women GPs

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women general medical practitioners there were in 1970, 1979, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The figures are provided in the table.

Last year the number of women GPs increased by a further 4·5 per cent. continuing the encouraging trend of previous years. Now nearly one in four GPs are women.

	Number of women GPs (England)	*Percentage of females to the total*
1970	2,082	11
1979	3,261	15
1989	5,830	23
1990	6,093	24

Rehabilitation (Brain Injuries)

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to improve national health service rehabilitation services for people with brain injury.

Mr. Dorrell: We are pleased to announce a central Government initiative to improve rehabilitation services for people with brain injury. We will support the development of a number of centres around the country which can act as a model for the rest of the national health service. We shall be inviting bids for funds. We shall also be funding a research study to evaluate the services provided.

We recognise the vital contribution which skilled rehabilitation can make to recovery from the traumatic effects of brain injury. The aim is to restore normal functioning as far as possible and to return the patient to independent living in the community.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Commercial Whaling

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with whom he has had consultations on commercial whaling.

Mr. Gummer: I have recently discussed our policy on this matter with the all-party parliamentary group for animal welfare and wildlife link, the umbrella group for the major United Kingdom environmental organisations. In addition, the House itself debated this subject on 30 April. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary discussed the issue with the Norwegian Government on his recent visit to Norway and my officials have had a number of meetings with representatives of Governments of some members of the International Whaling Commission.

Animal Cruelty, Spain

Mr. Parry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the representations he has received to date concerning cruelty to animals in Spain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have received representations from Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA, which have both provided video-taped material alleging breaches in Spanish slaughterhouses of the EC provisions on pre-slaughter stunning. We are asking the Commission what action it intends to take and in the meantime we continue to refuse to license exports of food animals to Spain.

Farm Incinerators

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consideration his Department is giving to exempting, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, rules monitoring small farm incinerators, provided they are lined and fitted with flame-wash after-burners;

(2) if he will make a statement on progress on discussions he is having with the farming industry on exemptions on waste incineration under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 provisions; and when he expects to conclude discussions.

Mr. Maclean: Following discussions with farming and hunting interests it has been agreed that there should be an exemption from the inspection and authorisation requirements under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for incinerators designed to incinerate certain farm wastes, including animal carcases, at a rate of no more than 50 kg per hour.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations which obtained contracts to carry out toxicological evaluations of pesticide active ingredients in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Organisations with contracts to evaluate pesticide active ingredients in 1990-91 were:

Inveresk Research International
Life Science Research
British Industrial Biological Research
Dr. Brian Hunter (Independent Consultant)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations which will be consulted over the review of pesticides; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The following organisations are on the consultation list for the review of older pesticides, in addition to the approval holders concerned.

Association of Consultants to the Bioscience Industries
Association of County Public Health Officers
Association of Independent Crop Consultants
Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Brewers Society
British Agricultural Export Council
British Agrochemicals Association
British Agrochemicals Supply Industry Scheme
British Association for Chemical Specialists
British Association of Landscape Industries
British Association of Plant Breeders
British Bee Farmers Association
British Bee Keepers Association
British Chemical Distributors and Traders Association
British Crop Protection Council
British Pest Control Association
British Pot Plant Growers Association
British Railways Board
British Society of Plant Breeders
British Wood Preserving Association
Campaign for Freedom of Information
Campden Food Preservation Research Association
Chemical Industries Association
Consumer Association
Consumers in the European Community Group
Council for Environmental Conservation
Countryside Commission
Countryside Commission for Scotland
Farmers Union of Wales
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Information Bureau
Friends of the Earth Ltd.
Friends of the Earth (Scotland)
Fruit and Vegetable Canners Association
National Consumer Council
National Farmers Union
National Farmers Union of Scotland
National Farmers Union (Wales)
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Women's Institutes
Pesticides Trust
Public Health and Industrial Pesticides Council
Royal Horticultural Society
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Scottish Consumer Council
Trade Union Congress
Transport and General Workers Union
Water Authorities Association
Welsh Consumer Council
Wickham Laboratories Ltd.
United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association

Commission of the European Communities and regulatory authorities in other countries, where appropriate.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of BSE confirmed cases in the United Kingdom for each month from October 1990 until April 1991.

Mr. Gummer: The number of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom listed by month of onset of clinical signs, from October 1990 to December 1990, the latest month for which figures are available, is as follows:

Month (1990)	*Number*
October	1,230
November	1,315
December	1,540

Milk Quotas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to phase out milk quotas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Milk quotas are decided upon by the whole European Community and for that reason I expect them to continue for some years to come.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 May 1991

TRANSPORT

Bus Companies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were *(a)* the numbers of buses owned, *(b)* the numbers of staff employed and *(c)* the net book value of the assets of the National Bus Company subsidiary, Yorkshire Traction Company.

Mr. McLoughlin: When the company was privatised in January 1987, it owned 328 buses, employed 1,470 staff and the net book value of its assets was £4·120 million.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report*, column *306*, on licences for taxi drivers, what assessment he has made of the difficulties created for local authorities in fulfilling the requirements of section 59(1)(a), and section 51(1)(a) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 by their lack of access to criminal records from the police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am aware that local authorities can encounter difficulties in satisfying themselves that applicants for such licences are fit and proper persons, and I understand that my Home Office colleagues and the Association of Chief Police Officers are considering this issue following the completion, in April, of the scrutiny study report on criminal records. The scrutiny study was undertaken in response to a Home Affairs Select Committee report in December 1990.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are currently four executive agencies in the Department of Transport:

The Vehicle Inspectorate (VI)
The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)
The Driving Standards Agency (DSA)
The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA)

VI was established as the Government's first executive agency on 1 August 1988; DVLA, DSA and VCA were established on 2 April 1990.

I announced, at column *1*, on 15 April this year, that the Transport and Road Research Laboratory (TRRL) should become a candidate for executive agency status under the "next steps" initiative.

British Rail (Financing)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the external financing limit of British Rail in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* 1990-91, in cash terms and at constant prices.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's external financing limits and outturns for 1979-80 and 1990-91 were:

	Limit £ million	*Outturn £ million*
1979-80		
Cash	715	715
1990-91 prices	1,545	1,545
1990-91		
Cash	700	1,016
1990-91 prices	700	1,016

Newtownards (Aircraft Movement)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions apply to aircraft flying from Ards airport over the residential areas of Strangford Heights, Morstan Park and Bowtown road in Newtownards; whether any new restrictions have been applied to flight paths at this location in the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The rules applying to all civil aircraft in respect of the overflight of residential areas are contained in the Rules of the Air Regulations 1990. Essentially these prohibit any aircraft from flying over such areas below either a height which will enable it to alight clear of the area in the event of an engine failure on a single-engined aircraft or a height of 1,500 ft whichever is the higher, unless the aircraft is taking off or landing in accordance with normal aviation practice. These rules are applied by the Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation and I am advised by the CAA that there have been no significant changes over the past five years.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any agent on behalf of his Department inspected the light aircraft which crashed at Morstan Park in Newtownards on 14 May 1991, before the removal of the damaged aeroplane.

Mr. Rifkind: Following the initial notification of the accident, the air accidents investigation branch gave permission for the damaged light aircraft to be removed from the accident site. AAIB inspectors did not examine the aircraft before its removal.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what form of inquiry will be held to investigate the crash of a light aircraft at Morston Park, Newtownards, on Tuesday 14 May; when the inquiry will commence; who will preside at the inquiry; whether local residents of the Morston Park/Strangford Heights area of Newtownards will be invited to give evidence; whether the inquiry will be in public; whether the report of the inquiry will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The air accidents investigation branch is investigating the circumstances of the accident to the light aircraft at Morston Park, Newtownards on Tuesday 14

May. The inquiry commenced on 15 May 1991 and is being conducted by an inspector of air accidents. Any person with evidence concerning the circumstances of the accident is invited to contact the chief inspector of air accidents. The inquiry will not be held in public but the circumstances will be published in an AAIB bulletin.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the various accidents and crashes involving aircraft in the vicinity of Newtownards during the past five years.

Mr. Rifkind: The Civil Aviation Authority's safety data and analysis unit records show that there have been 10 reportable accidents in the vicinity of Newtownards in the past five years. All have involved light aircraft.

Commercial Road, London

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he first received a request from the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar for him to arrange a meeting with Ministers or departmental officials concerning road works in the Commercial road, east London; when a substantive reply was sent; when any meeting is to take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Member's letter was received on 25 April. I have copied to the hon. Member my letter of 17 May to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on this subject. I shall arrange a meeting as soon as possible after the Whitsun recess.

Rail Freight (Safety)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the adequacy of safety precautions for the transport of toxic or flammable freight by rail, as evidenced by the derailment and fire on a train carrying flammable goods at Bradford-on-Tone, near Wellington, Somerset in the early hours of 16 May.

Mr. Freeman: Dangerous goods are carried by rail in accordance with the British Railways Board's list of dangerous goods and conditions of acceptance by rail on freight services and parcels service. Major incidents involving toxic substances or the spillage of large quantities of flammable substances, such as the one referred to, are infrequent. There have been no deaths and very few injuries since 1984.

Responsibility for operational safety rests primarily with the railway operator. Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, a part of the Health and Safety Executive, is responsible for enforcement of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 on the railways.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for sales by individuals of single dwellings the number and average value of transactions nationally and regionally in 1989 and 1990 by range of consideration as set out in his proposals for a council tax;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for disposals of *(a)* freehold and *(b)* leasehold residential property by individuals in 1989, as shown in Inland Revenue Statistics 1990, the number and average value of properties falling within each of his council tax bands together with the median within each band and the median overall; and if he will provide similar figures for sales by councils to sitting tenants.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 15 May at columns *173-74*.

Household Composition

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of households with three or more adults and the numbers of those on national assistance;

(2) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of two-adult households with one child and the number of those on national assistance;

(3) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of one-parent households, the number with one, two and three or more children and the number of those on national assistance;

(4) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of two-pensioner households and the number of those on national assistance;

(5) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of one-adult, non-retired households and the number of those on national assistance;

(6) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of three-adult households with children and the number of those on national assistance;

(7) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of two-adult, non-retired households and the number of those on national assistance;

(8) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of two-adult households with two children; and the number of those on national assistance;

(9) whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of single pensioner households and the number of those on national assistance.

Mr. Key: The only available information on household composition at district level is contained in table 39 of the county reports to the 1981 census, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. Similar analyses from the 1991 census will become available during 1992. Information on income support by household type at district level is not available.

Local Government Management

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish his consultation paper on the internal management of local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: When we have given due consideration to the issues.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the proportion of his ministerial duties that has been taken up by *(a)* the review into the structure and finance of local government and *(b)* achieving the objectives of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" during the last (i) month and (ii) six months.

Mr. Heseltine: I do not keep timesheets.

Local Authorities (Government Grants)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of Government grant per head of the population for 1990-91 and 1992 in the local authorities of *(a)* Blyth Valley, *(b)* Wansbeck, *(c)* Castle Morpeth and *(d)* North Tyneside.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Government grants in 1990-91, consisting of revenue support grant, special grant, specific grants in aggregate external finance, community charge benefit grant and transitional relief grant, per head of relevant population, are £364 in Blyth Valley, £259 in Wansbeck, £236 in Castle Morpeth and £360 in north Tyneside.

Squash Clubs

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the impact of the uniform business rate on commercially operated squash clubs.

Mr. Key: We have received many representations on the new non-domestic rating system. As far as I am aware, however, there has been none on the impact on commercially operated squash clubs.

Local Government

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to consider the methods of organising local government in the United States of America and European Community countries in his review of local government.

Mr. Key: Yes.

Community Charge Reduction Scheme

Sir William Shelton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much community charge payers in Lambeth, who are eligible, will benefit in 1991-92 from the community charge reduction scheme, where the property in which they live paid *(a)* average rates in 1989-90, *(b)* half the average rate and *(c)* quarter the average rate; and what was the average domestic rate in Lambeth in 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: As a result of the Government's general £140 reduction in headline charges and of the community charge reduction scheme, a couple in Lambeth living in a property of average rateable value for the area will have to pay £568 between them, in a property of half average rateable value £310 between them and in one quarter of average rateable value £181 between them. The average domestic rates bill in Lambeth in 1989-90 was £516.

Property Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether his estimate for illustrative purposes of the average value of residential properties included mobile homes; and if he will publish a table showing his estimate of *(a)* the average value for each region and *(b)* the difference for each region, and each price range between his estimate and that of the table 2b attached to his answer of 13 May on property transfers, *Official Report*, columns *21-24;*

(2) whether he will publish a table showing, on the basis of the number and average values shown in the answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *21-24*, on property transfers, the amount of council tax payable in each region as a percentage of their value.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 15 May at columns *173-74*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each of his seven bands the numbers and average values of privately owned and publicly owned dwellings on the basis of the latest quarterly survey, together with the amount of council tax which would be payable in respect of those dwellings, grossed up, at the seven tax rates in his consultative document.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Local Tax, Germany

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the yield from local tax of 0·5 per cent. on the value of residential property in Germany.

Mr. Key: None.

Abandoned Trolleys

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have made use of the powers available under section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not held centrally by my Department. We would expect authorities to use section 99 powers only as a last resort. We would prefer them to enter into voluntary arrangements on trolley control with trolley owners. But if local traders are unwilling to follow the code of guidance on trolley control issued by the Retail Consortium, authorities now have the power to operate a statutory trolley collection scheme.

Train Fire and Pollution

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what pollution has resulted from the derailment and fire on a train carrying kerosene, petrol and diesel at Bradford-on-Tone, near Wellington, Somerset in the early hours of 16 May.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that prompt action by the National Rivers Authority helped to ensure that little pollution ensued.

The spillage of some 50,000 gallons of fuel oil was confined to an area close to the railway and a minor water

course. A few small fish were killed. The River Tone was not affected. The NRA will take further action if necessary.

Travelling People

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish draft planning guidance on sites for travelling show people.

Mr. Yeo: My Department has today published draft guidance which emphasises to planning authorities that in formulating development plan policies, in development control decisions, and in considering enforcement action, they should take account of travelling show people's need for secure, long-term sites. The text has been sent to a wide range of consultees, who have been invited to submit their views by 19 July. A separate but parallel consultation is being carried out by the Welsh Office.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out *(a)* the level of central Government grant assumed to be paid to Hertfordshire county council and each district council in the country in the indicative tables of council tax produced by his Department and *(b)* the level of rate support grant assumed to be paid to each district council for 1991-92 under the community charge.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given at column *12* on 29 April to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter).

Urban Development Corporation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *661*, with regard to the number of jobs created in each urban development corporation area, if he will update the table to include information to March 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The totals of permanent jobs created or attracted, net of losses, are as follows:

UDC	*Net gain in jobs to March 1991*
Black Country	9,381
Bristol	484
Central Manchester	1,496
Leeds	[1]4,605
London Docklands	31,000
Merseyside	4,626
Sheffield	7,787
Teesside	4,500
Trafford Park	3,267
Tyne and Wear	2,544
Total	69,690

[1] The figure previously given for jobs created in the Leeds Development Corporation's area to March 1990—5,241—was a gross figure; the net figure, not available when the reply was given, was 3,964.

Local Authority Spending

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures the Government intend to take to strengthen their powers to curb excessive local authority spending.

Mr. Heseltine: Stronger capping powers are necessary to enable the Government to protect all charge payers from excessive spending by local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his March Budget a fundamental and permanent shift from local to national taxation for the funding of local services. We are determined to ensure that in future the very substantial extra sums of money we are now providing are not wasted in higher spending by local authorities but continue to keep charges down to reasonable levels. All authorities must exercise restraint and play their part in the fight against inflation.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have therefore decided to introduce before the Whitsun recess a Bill to abolish the exemption from capping of English and Welsh authorities with budgets of less than £15 million, and to bring the Scottish capping powers into line with those which apply in England and Wales. If approved, it would, inter alia, enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for the first time to cap an authority whose year-on-year increase in expenditure he considered to be excessive.

The Bill will also contain provisions enabling properties to be allocated to bands in preparation for the introduction of the new council tax from 1 April 1993.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what he treats as economic migration, in respect of refugees arriving in this country;

(2) if he will list for the last 12 months in respect of asylum seekers deemed to be economic migrants seeking refuge in this country *(a)* from what country they came and *(b)* to which country they were returned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: "Economic migrant" is not a distinct category in the determination of asylum claims. Asylum seekers come to the United Kingdom for various reasons. Economic factors are often significant. Applications fall to be determined according to the criteria laid down in the United Nations convention.

Crime, Leicestershire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give the total numbers of offences recorded in Leicestershire in 1990 and the numbers that have been cleared up, together with any monthly figures that are available for 1991;

(2) if he will give the annual totals of crimes reported in Leicestershire that involve violence, or the threat of violence, from 1975 to 1990; and if he will give the numbers cleared up as a percentage of the above totals for each year.

Mr. John Patten: The information is published in the annual reports of the chief constable of Leicestershire

copies of which from 1980 are available in the Library; and for 1986-89 in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", tables 2.19, 2.20 and 2.21, and for 1989 Cm. 1322, copies of which are also available in the Library. Corresponding information for 1991 is not yet available.

West Midlands Police

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers and civilians were employed in the Walsall H division of the West Midlands police authority for each year since 1978.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

West midlands police H division (Walsall)

Year ending 31 December	*Police strength*	*Civilian staff strength*
1978	384	not known
1979	400	75
1980	419	78
1981	427	79
1982	429	80
1983	423	77
1984	413	80
1985	415	74
1986	408	99
1987	416	113
1988	434	126
1989	445	128
1990	452	123
1991[1]	452	123

[1] As at 30 April 1991.

Tote Board

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the definition of the role and duties of the chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board which were given to him prior to his re-appointment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for the chairman to determine his role and duties within the confines of the statutory duties and functions of the Horserace Totalisator Board under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 and the Horserace Totalisator and Betting Levy Boards Act 1972.

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the annual contribution to racing of the Horserace Totalisator Board in each year since 1964.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The annual contribution to racing by the Horserace Totalisator Board is set out in its report and financial statements for the year laid annually before Parliament, together with that of the levy board.

The figures for the years in question, which have been derived from the reports by the Tote, are as follows:

Year	*Total*
1964-65	1,048,842
1965-66	885,150
1966-67	964,616
1967-68	875,965
1968-69	631,945
1969-70	626,996
1970-71	195,000
1971-72	195,000
1972-73	270,000
1973-74	501,305
1974-75	410,000
1975-76	441,000
1976-77	488,704
1977-78	625,411
1978-79	988,268
1979-80	1,449,433
1980-81	1,803,176
1981-82	1,834,207
1982-83	1,599,921
1983-84	1,589,094
1984-85	1,768,329
1985-86	2,004,000
1986-87	2,510,000
1987-88	3,172,000
1988-89	4,317,000
1989-90	4,765,000

Notes:

1. The contribution to racing excludes capital contribution to joint project (£1,240,000) in 1989-90 bringing the total contribution to racing to £6,005,000.
2. In the year 1973-74—1977-78 the Tote repaid a levy board loan of £465,605 at an annual rate of £93,121. This repayment has been excluded from the figures for the appropriate year.
3. The Tote paid no levy in the year 1970-71 and 1971-72 and only £75,000 in 1972-73 due to its precarious financial position.

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange to publish the annual accounts of the Horserace Totalisator Board as separate business divisions covering, respectively, the racecourse totalisator, Tote credit and Tote bookmaking.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It is for the Tote to decide how to publish its accounts, subject to statutory provisions. As well as its annual report to Parliament, the Tote also makes annual returns to Companies House, concerning Tote Credit Ltd. and Tote Bookmakers Ltd. The figures for turnover of the three divisions are set out separately in the annual report. The Tote does not otherwise provide detailed breakdowns of its separate divisions as it regards such information as commercially sensitive.

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions were held with the chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board to establish business priorities prior to his re-appointment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for the Horserace Totalisator Board to establish business priorities for the Tote within the statutory framework set out in the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 and the Horserace Totalisator and Betting Levy Boards Act 1972.

Defence Component Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of policing the defence component equipment exhibition *(a)* between 14 and 16 May and *(b)* during the visit of General Pinochet.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand from the West Midlands police that no additional police costs were incurred in the policing of the defence component equipment exhibition between 14 and 16 May.

Football Matches

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has made a decision on the guidance to be given to police authorities on the charges to

be made for police officers deployed at football matches under section 15 of the Police Act 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have given careful consideration to the views of Lord Justice Taylor, the Audit Commission, the Home Affairs Committee and interested parties. I have concluded that full economic costs should be charged for police officers deployed on the private property of football clubs. It cannot be right for police budgets to provide a hidden subsidy to the football industry, particularly in view of the considerable costs borne by the police for policing football crowds in public places before and after matches.

However, in view of the difficulties that may be faced by some clubs, particularly those facing considerable costs in meeting Lord Justice Taylor's other recommendations, I am advising police authorities to exercise their discretion and phase in full charges over a period of up to five years where appropriate. The same principles will apply to charges made for special police services at other events.

Guidance will be issued shortly and copies will be placed in the Library.

Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many adoptions have been approved by his Department for parents wishing to adopt Romanian children; how many have been turned down; how many are in the process of application; and if he will make a statement on adoptions from other countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since December 1989, 238 Romanian children have been granted entry clearance with a view to adoption. Ten applications have been refused, 14 withdrawn and 37 are currently outstanding, 25 of which have been made since 1 April 1991. Information about children from other countries granted entry clearance with a view to adoption is not collected centrally.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims for asylum were outstanding as at *(a)* 31 December 1988, *(b)* 31 December 1989 and *(c)* 31 December 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 17 May 1991]:* The available information is given in the table.

Number of asylum applications outstanding

Date	*Total*
As at:	
31 December 1988	10,710
31 December 1989	[1]16,190
31 December 1990	[1]34,500

[1] Provisional estimates. The figure for 31 December 1990 is likely to understate due to delays in recording.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Soviet Union

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will list the specific services offered by overseas trade services staff; and what efforts have been made to overcome the difficulties created by problems in the Soviet economy.

Mr. Sainsbury: The services offered are: market information inquiries; overseas status report service; support for missions, trade fairs and overseas seminars; new products from Britain; export intelligence service; export market research scheme; overseas project fund; consultancy under the export initiative, as well as practical advice. These are described in the brochure, "The Export Initiative", a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his reply of 13 May, *Official Report*, column 39, on ECGD cover for export credits for the Soviet Union, if he will take into account in his review the competition faced by firms in the United Kingdom from firms in other countries whose Governments do not intend to withdraw cover.

Mr. Sainsbury: I can confirm that the review will take account, inter alia, of the cover position of the other export credit agencies.

Export Restrictions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the enhanced proliferation control initiative launched by President Bush in November 1990 had any impact on British exports.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* There is no evidence to indicate that the United States initiative has had any direct impact on British exports.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for how many of the chemicals denoted as precursors of concern by the Australia Group Her Majesty's Government do not require export licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The Australia Group has identified on its warning list 50 chemical weapons precursors of concern, of which 37 are specifically subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 (as amended). Controls were further strengthened last year by addition of an end-use control which renders the export of any chemical from the United Kingdom subject to control, where the exporter knows or suspects that it is for use for chemical or biological weapons purposes.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on British armaments exported since 1979 which were *(a)* retained by the designated end user and *(b)* illegally transferred to persons or organisations not designated as end users by the export certificate.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* It has been the policy of this and successive Governments not to reveal details of individual licence applications.

Company Liquidations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which the auditor of a creditor company will be prevented from acting as the receiver or liquidator of a company owing money to that creditor.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such plans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to propose legislation under which the firms auditing a company will not be allowed to have one of their partners appointed as a liquidator.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such plans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the statutory arrangements for monitoring the work of insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Redwood: The insolvency service monitors the estate accounting of insolvency practitioners to seek to ensure that funds are paid into the insolvency services account by them in accordance with the legislation. The insolvency service also monitors compliance by insolvency practitioners with the requirements to report on the conduct of directors under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any proposals under which senior partners from accountancy firms criticised by his Department's inspectors will be required to attend courses on business ethics.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Satellite Television

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals have been made by the European Community for the harmonisation of satellite television-receiving equipment, what will be the impact of these proposals on individuals who have such equipment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The European Commission is consulting interested parties on how to follow up directive 86/529/EEC which imposes the MAC family of transmission standards on high-power direct-to-home satellite broadcasts. Currently the majority of viewers receive satellite broadcasts in PAL from medium-power satellites. It is understood that the Commission will make its proposals known shortly. The Government are not in favour of any regulations which impose on viewers the obligation to purchase new or additional equipment in order to receive the services they currently enjoy. The Government believe that consumers should be free to invest in new technology when they decide the time is right.

WALES

Labour Statistics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those travel-to-work areas, together with the respective percentages, where 40 per cent. or more of employees are employed in production.

Mr. David Hunt: The most recent estimates of employees in employment in travel-to-work areas are from the September 1989 census of employment. The table shows those Welsh travel-to-work areas where 40 per cent. or more of employees are employed in production (divisions 1-4 of Standard Industrial Classification, Revised 1980) industries:

TTWA	*Employees employed in production as percentage of all employees*
Neath and Port Talbot	42·7
Wrexham	41·5
Merthyr and Rhymney	41·4
Llanelli	40·1

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of all employees in Wales are employed in *(a)* production and *(b)* services.

Mr. David Hunt: In December 1990, it is estimated that 26·7 per cent. and 66·5 per cent. of all employees in employment in Wales were employed in the production (divisions 1-4 of Standard Industrial Classification, Revised 1980) and services (divisions 6-9 of SIC 1980) industries respectively.

Abandoned Trolleys

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities have made use of the powers available under section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 21 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Antarctica

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), *Official Report*, of 10 May, column *604*, whether Her Majesty's Government now intend to pursue the objective of creating an international wilderness reserve in Antarctica.

The Prime Minister: The Government have welcomed the draft text from the Madrid meeting. Article I of the draft protocol would designate Antarctica as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science. We support that designation.

General Pinochet

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister how much official expenditure has been incurred in connection with General Pinochet's visit to the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The visit to this country by General Pinochet was a private visit. No additional official expenditure was incurred.

"Kill the Messenger"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will acquire for the library at No. 10 Downing street a copy of Sir Bernard Ingham's "Kill the Messenger".

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Sir Bernard has already sent a copy of his book to my office.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe (Retired Police)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to Zimbabwe about the fall in value of both the pensions and the Zimbabwe funds paid to former members of the British South Africa Police who served there throughout their active careers and are now living in retirement in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the Zimbabwe Government are meeting their legal obligations on the payment of pensions to their ex-public servants. No representations have therefore been made to them about this. The question of exchange control is an internal matter for the Zimbabwe Government, but we take every opportunity to remind them of the hardship which their controls can cause for people who wish to transfer funds from Zimbabwe.

Refugees (Iraq)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Iran is paying for the transport of British aid to refugees in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: No. The costs of transport for supplies of British aid are paid by the ODA.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Trade Statistics

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), *Official Report*, 17 April, columns *179-80*, if he will provide the same information for each year since 1979 at constant 1990 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The current account balance is not available at constant prices.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the gross domestic product at constant prices in each year since April 1979, excluding North sea oil and gas production.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Figures of the output measure of the gross domestic product at constant 1985 factor cost excluding the contribution of the oil and gas extraction industry are available in index form only as shown.

1985 = 100

	1985 factor cost
1979	96·0
1980	93·2
1981	91·0
1982	91·9
1983	94·2
1984	96·7
1985	100·0
1986	103·4
1987	108·4
1988	113·9
1989	117·3
1990	118·1

Property Transfers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *21-24*, concerning residential property transfers, whether he will publish a table giving for the latest quarterly samples information on the same basis as in table I in his reply; and if he will add an estimate of the number and average value of transactions where the price was less than £40,000 and more than £160,000.

Mr. Maude: Owing to the size and structure of the sample used in the survey of property transactions, it is not possible to provide reliable quarterly estimates. The following table gives the other information requested:

Freehold residential properties transferred in 1989 and 1990
Numbers: thousands
Average values: £ thousands

	1989				*1990*			
	Price less than £40,000		*Price more than £160,000*		*Price less than £40,000*		*Price more than £160,000*	
	Numbers	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*	*Numbers*	*Average*
North	51	21	[2]—	359	39	21	[2]—	251
Yorkshire and Humberside	105	22	2	248	58	23	2	258
East Midlands	47	24	2	255	35	26	1	245
East Anglia	13	22	2	268	11	24	1	260
South East[1]	50	23	19	270	33	21	17	257
Greater London	19	21	10	330	17	18	11	295
South West	30	21	6	264	24	20	4	254
West Midlands	60	21	3	265	44	21	2	267
North West	83	22	2	253	62	21	2	263
England	457	22	45	281	325	22	40	267
Wales	44	21	1	260	34	19	1	265
England and Wales	501	22	46	281	358	21	41	267

[1] Excludes London.
[2] Less than 500.
Source: Survey of property transactions 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *21-24*, concerning residential property transfers, whether transfers of residential property under category L of the Stamp Duty (Exempt Instruments) Regulations 1987 are included in his figures; and whether he will provide an estimate of the proportion of *(a)* transfers at nominal value between connected persons and disposals and transfers of part shares in a house, *(b)* council house sales under the right-to-buy scheme, and *(c)* other miscellaneous transactions.

Mr. Maude: Transfers to which category L of the Stamp Duty (Exempt Instruments) Regulations 1987 apply are not transfers on sale and are not generally included in the survey of property transactions which was used to provide the estimates given in the answer of 13 May.

As regards the second half of the question, it is not possible to give estimates from the survey of property transactions for each of the categories requested.

Heathrow Airport (VAT-free Goods)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the terms of the agreement between Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and BAA whereby goods will be sold at Heathrow airport free of VAT.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There is no agreement as such. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are prepared to consider applications from any airport operator for VAT-free shopping facilities where it can be demonstrated to Customs' satisfaction that sales will be restricted to outbound passengers who will export their purchases. There is no question of goods being sold free of VAT for consumption at airports or to passengers on domestic flights.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those Inland Revenue forms and associated documentation which *(a)* require to be completed and *(b)* require to be read as a result of his proposals to tax mobile telephones.

Mr. Maude: There are no new forms to be completed because the tax charge on mobile telephones is not new. The Budget proposal for a standard benefit charge on mobile telephones, extended to include those fitted in company cars, simplifies the records which employers need to keep.

As part of the normal Budget information service to employers, they have been issued with guidance on how to complete the existing return for benefits in kind—the form P11D.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the use of mobile telephones by size of firm; and if he will give the proportion of the total number of mobile telephones in use by employment size bands in firms with *(a)* one to two, *(b)* three to five, *(c)* six to 10, *(d)* 11 to 19, *(e)* 20 to 49 and *(f)* over 50 employees.

Mr. Maude: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the approximate number of *(a)* 1990-91 P11D forms, *(b)* 1991-92 tax code forms and *(c)* 1991-92 P11D forms that are required to be completed or acted upon by employers as a result of his proposal to tax mobile telephones.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend's Budget proposals for mobile telephones will not require employer returns (forms P11D) for 1990-91 since they do not take effect until the following year. For 1991-92 the extension of the benefits in kind charge to mobile telephones in cars will also not increase the number of P11Ds required. This is because a return is already needed for mobile telephones not fixed in cars, which are provided by employers and subject to private use, and because company cars are subject to a benefits-in-kind charge in any case whether or not they have a mobile telephone fitted. As a transitional effect of the proposals, there will be an increase in amended PAYE tax codes for 1991-92, but a reliable estimate of the number involved is not possible.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the value of income tax personal allowances has increased in real terms since 1979; and how this amount has been distributed to each band of income taxpayers, both in total and in amount per taxpayer.

Mr. Maude: Since 1978-79, the personal allowance has increased in real terms by about 27 per cent., the married man's allowance by 24 per cent. and the age-related allowances by at least 16 per cent. If, for 1991-92, the personal, married couple's and higher age-related allowances were reduced to levels equivalent to the 1978-79 allowances indexed to 1991-92, total income tax liability would be increased by some £5 billion, distributed as follows:

Real change in tax allowances since 1978-79
Change in tax liability 1991-92

Individual's income £ per annum	*Single people* Total £ million	*Single people* Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	*Husbands* Total £ million	*Husbands* Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	*Wives* Total £ million	*Wives* Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum
Less than 5,000	230	120	20	100	150	90
5,000–10,000	600	150	440	200	340	160
10,000–15,000	480	160	720	230	170	160
15,000–20,000	210	160	520	220	60	160
20,000–25,000	80	160	280	210	20	160

Individual's income £ per annum	Single people Total £ million	Single people Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	Husbands Total £ million	Husbands Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	Wives Total £ million	Wives Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum
25,000–30,000	40	190	150	220	10	190
30,000–50,000	60	250	290	330	20	250
Over 50,000	20	250	110	330	10	250
TOTAL	1,710	150	2,530	230	770	140

[1] Individual taxpayers liable to tax when personal allowances are reduced to their indexed 1978-79 levels.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1991-92, *(b)* the average value of relief per mortgagor and *(c)* the numbers receiving mortgage relief broken down in the income ranges, under £4,000, £4,000 to £5,000, £5,000 to £6,000, £6,000 to £7,000, £7,000 to £8,000, £8,000 to £9,000, £9,000 to £10,000, £10,000 to £12,000, £12,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £25,000, £25,000 to £30,000 and over £30,000.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are based on projected information from the 1988-89 survey of personal incomes and the 1989 family expenditure survey and are provisional. They are also based on the assumptions that interest rates remain at their current levels for the rest of 1991-92.

Single people and married couples receiving mortgage interest relief by range of total income in 1991-92

Range of total income	Numbers receiving mortgage interest relief (thousands)	Average value of relief per mortgagor (£)	Total cost of relief (£ million)
Up to £5,000	460	550	250
£5,001-£6,000	110	500	50
£6,001-£7,000	90	510	50
£7,001-£8,000	190	560	110
£8,001-£9,000	250	580	140
£9,001-£10,000	310	630	200
£10,001-£12,000	660	620	410
£12,001-£15,000	1,180	640	760
£15,001-£20,000	2,090	710	1,480
£20,001-£25,000	1,610	700	1,130
£25,001-£30,000	990	730	720
Over £30,000	1,560	780	1,200
Total	9,500	680	6,500

Goodman Meat

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what gifts Customs staff in Northern Ireland have received from interests associated with the Goodman Meat firm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Customs have no evidence that any members of their staff in Northern Ireland have received gifts from Goodman Meat firms.

Income Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the yield in 1991-92 and 1992-93 from introducing a new rate of income tax of 50 per cent. on incomes above £50,000.

Mr. Maude: The estimated revenue yield is about £¾ billion in 1991-92 and £1¼ billion in 1992-93. These estimates take no account of any behavioural effects that might result from such a change.

PSA Services

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the progress of the arrangements introduced in 1990-91 for payment by Government Department clients for works services supplied by PSA Services.

Mr. Mellor: Arrangements for payment were introduced on schedule from 1 April 1990. However, some teething problems with the invoicing arrangements have meant that client Departments have not been able to complete all the normal checks on some of the invoices presented to them by PSAS. In order to ensure that amounts paid by PSAS to contractors on clients' behalf are brought to account in appropriation accounts for 1990-91, interim arrangements have been made. Under these, Departments will pay from their votes, as adjustable advances, amounts shown on PSAS invoices, provided that they can identify the expenditure as relating to buildings or projects for which they are responsible; that they are aware that work has been done, or services provided, in respect of the building or project concerned; and that the amount charged is not grossly excessive. Any payments of this nature will be identified in a note to the appropriation accounts for 1990-91. PSAS will take any significant balance of expenditure reflected in invoices still unmet to its own Vote. Customer Departments and PSAS will pursue outstanding queries and make any necessary adjustments as early as possible in 1991-92. Such adjustments will be noted in the appropriate accounts for that year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Honorary Consuls

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names and addresses of honorary British consuls in the United States and honorary American consuls in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The names and addresses of British honorary consuls in the United States are as follows:

Kansas City:
Mr. S. A. Hamilton, c/o Hallmark Cards, 2501 McGee Trafficway, Kansas City, Missouri 64108.

St. Louis:
Mr. R. A. Smith, 625 S Skinker Blvd, St. Louis, Missouri 63105.

New Orleans:
Mr. J. J. Coleman, 10th Floor, 321 St. Charles Ave, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130.

Philadelphia:
Mr. C. E. Mather, 226 Walnut St., Philadelphia PA 19106.

Puerto Rico:
Dr. I. Court, San Juan (HC), Taft Street No. 1, Suite 5E Santurce 00911.

Anchorage:
Dr. D. R. Hitchins, University of Alaska, Anchorage College of Arts and Sciences, 2311 Providence Drive, Anchorage, Alaska 99508.

Portland:
Mr. A. Hay, 3515 SW Council Crest Drive, Portland, Oregon 97201.

The position of the honorary consul in Norfolk, Virginia is vacant. Our embassy in Washington is seeking the approval of the State Department for our proposed replacement.

There are no American honorary appointments in the United Kingdom.

Polish Citizens (Visas)

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now change the arrangements for the issue of visas to Polish citizens wishing to come to the United Kingdom, so that visas can be obtained by post instead of requiring personal attendance at the British embassy in Warsaw to obtain the necessary documents.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is possible for anyone to apply for a visa without personal attendance, by using the services of Orbis or another recognised travel agent. This is safer and more reliable then the postal service, and the cost is comparable with that of registered mail.

Iraq (Missing Journalists)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any representations to the Iranian Government to seek their assistance in finding Nicholas Della Casa, Rosanna Della Casa and Charles Maxwell, British journalists missing in Iraq.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. The British embassy in Tehran has asked Iranian authorities on a number of occasions for help in finding the missing journalists.

There is no evidence that the journalists entered Iran.

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the provisions of Security Council resolution No. 687 in relation to the Gulf are being adhered to.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* We and other members of the Security Council keep Iraqi compliance with the council's resolution 687 under close review.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with whom he has discussed proposals to use the US nuclear emergency search team to verify Iraqi compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 687.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Any proposals to use personnel in support of the work of the IAEA and the Special Commission to implement UNSCR 687 are for discussion between the IAEA and the Special Commission and the United States authorities.

British Embassy, Teheran

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the visa section of the British embassy in Teheran to resume operations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* We have no plans to open a visa section in our embassy in Teheran.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those states identified by Her Majesty's Government as *(a)* already possessing ballistic missiles and *(b)* having the potential to build ballistic missiles.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The following countries are known or believed to possess ballistic missiles:

Afghanistan
Belgium
Bulgaria
China
Czechoslovakia
Egypt
France
Germany
Italy
Korea, Republic of
Libya
Netherlands
Poland
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Syria
Hungary
Iran
Iraq
Israel
USSR
United Kingdom
United States of America
Yemen

In addition, North Korea, which is not recognised as a state by Her Majesty's Government, is believed to have deployed ballistic missiles.

In addition, the following countries have in the past shown an interest in developing ballistic missiles.

Argentina
Brazil
India
Pakistan
South Africa

Albania

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about resuming diplomatic relations with Albania.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The Albanian Foreign Minister called on me on 13 May. We discussed the question of the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Albania. We hope to give an early reply to the Albanian offer to restore diplomatic relations.

IAEA Safeguards

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to include on the agenda of the next meeting of the international organisations in Vienna a discussion of the proposals by ambassador Tetsuya Endo to extend the scope and increase the budgets of the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards budgets.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Safeguards are on the provisional agenda of the June IAEA board of governors meeting and any related issues will no doubt be discussed then. We are studying the issues involved and will carefully consider all proposals.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Hackney Education Directorate

4. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Minister next plans to visit Hackney education directorate.

Mr. Eggar: I have arranged to visit Hackney on 13 June. I am also meeting the leader of the council on 6 June to discuss the action plan to improve the education service in Hackney.

Education and Training

13. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to increase the proportion of students in education and training post-16 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short).

Student Unions

15. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the responses he has received in connection with his examination of the future of student unions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am giving careful consideration to the various responses which I have received as a result of my letter of 29 November 1990. As the consultations are still in progress, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Cricket

16. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any further proposals to promote the playing of cricket in schools.

Mr. Atkins: Both schools and local sports clubs have an important role to play in the development of cricket for young people. Physical education in the national curriculum will be compulsory up to the age of 16 with effect from September 1992 and I am urging teachers and coaches to ensure that cricket is one of the competitive team games which is encouraged.

Teachers

17. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to change the basis of funding teachers' salaries under the local management of schools.

Mr. Fallon: Pupil-led funding is a basic principle of local management and we have no plans to change that. However, we have said that we shall review the effects of our policy on the treatment of salary costs as the transitional arrangements governing the change from historic to formula funding unwind.

25. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to encourage women to return to teaching; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: We are already encouraging women to return to teaching through our grants for education support and training (GEST) programme, which supports LEA measures to recruit returners and mature entrants to teaching. In 1991-92 about £10 million is available for this purpose and we have already earmarked a further £10 million for expenditure in 1992-93. Most potential returners are women who may need particular help to enable them to re-enter teaching. Many GEST-funded activities are directed specifically towards providing such help.

29. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on morale in the teaching profession.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have taken every opportunity to praise the dedication and achievements of teachers. The Government's intention to establish a pay review body for teachers recognises that commitment and will give practical effect to our desire to enhance the status of the profession. The interim advisory committee of school teachers' pay and conditions has noted an improvement in morale as the national curriculum is successfully introduced and the benefits of local management of schools start to be felt.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average length of time prospective teachers have to wait before being vetted for suitability for specific teaching posts.

Mr. Fallon: Recruitment of teachers, including deciding an applicant's suitability for a specific post, is a matter for

individual employers: LEAs, and the governing bodies of schools and other establishments. The Department does not collect statistics about the length of time taken by employers' recruitment procedures.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers are currently employed in sixth form colleges organised under school regulations.

Mr. Fallon: The number of qualified teachers employed in sixth form colleges in England in January 1990 was 7,278.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of qualified teachers who are not currently teaching.

Mr. Fallon: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what his Department estimates to be the average cost per year of *(a)* a primary school teacher and *(b)* a secondary school teacher.

Mr. Eggar: In April 1991 the estimated average cost, including employers' on-costs, of employing a primary school teacher outside London was some £19,340. The comparable figure for a secondary school teacher was about £21,160.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of teachers employed in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools on a yearly basis since 1970.

Mr. Fallon: The number of qualified full-time and part-time teachers employed in primary and secondary schools in England for the period 1970 to 1990, the latest date for which information is available, is given in the table.

Number of qualified teachers employed in maintained primary and secondary schools in England 1970 to 1990

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1970	194,971	185,682
1971	200,596	185,077
1972	210,755	194,831
1973	217,707	206,721
1974	222,880	223,683
1975	227,296	233,454
1976	226,925	241,047
1977	223,141	246,819
1978	205,338	236,354
1979	204,405	240,810
1980	200,534	242,475
1981	196,143	243,435
1982	188,876	240,476
1983	183,678	239,323
1984	181,852	237,368
1985	181,501	230,871
1986	183,313	225,715
1987	187,037	221,184
1988	191,910	215,231
1989	195,008	207,994
1990	199,498	203,400

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the latest figures for the number of full and part-time teachers employed by each of the local education authorities in England.

Mr. Fallon: The latest figures relate to January 1990 and are contained in the DES Statistical Bulletin 5/91, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Teesside Polytechnic

18. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the proposed linking of Teesside polytechnic with the university of Durham.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand that discussions are continuing between the polytechnic and the university about their joint plan to extend higher education opportunities in Teesside.

City Technology Colleges

19. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current progress and development of city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The CTC programme continues to make excellent progress. By this September 13 colleges will be up and running and I announced plans for new colleges in Bristol and Derby only last month. CTCs have proved extremely popular with pupils and their parents.

A-levels

20. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the position of the A-level in the curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

21. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to broaden the A-level examinations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As is clear from the White Paper, "Education and Training for the 21st Century", which we published yesterday, the Government remain committed to maintaining A-levels and the standards that they represent.

Grant-maintained Schools

22. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools are grant maintained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There are 62 grant-maintained schools in operation. To date we have approved applications from a further 16 schools.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to increase the number of grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The number of schools seeking and acquiring grant-maintained status is rising very rapidly. To date we have approved 78 applications. A further 74 schools have either published proposals or are committed to doing so following ballots in favour of applying for GM status. Seventy-nine ballots are pending. In the last three months alone, 49 schools have voted to apply for grant-maintained status.

We shall continue to make clear that we believe schools generally should consider the opportunities afforded by grant-maintained status.

Stratford School

23. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funds are being made available to Stratford school following the granting of grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: The level of annual maintenance grant for Stratford for 1991-92 has not been finalised. The proposed figure, issued to the school and to Newham local education authority for comment, is £1,551,435. Stratford school has received £52,950 in transitional grant. The school will receive special purpose grant (development) of £31,700 for the financial year 1991-92. A formula allocation of capital grant of up to £25,900 is available to the school for small capital works and the purchase of equipment. The governing body has made bids for capital grant for specific capital projects. These bids are being considered.

Further Education

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received any communications from the directors of further education colleges concerning his statement on 21 March.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a large number of letters from principals of further education colleges since 21 March. The great majority have expressed support for my proposals for the reorganisation of further education.

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order showing the percentages of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds participating in full-time and full-time plus part-time day education for 1989-90.

Mr. Eggar: The information is as follows:

Table A
Distribution of local authorities by age participation rate 16-year-olds (1989-90): Full-Time Education

Name of LEA	*Per cent.*
1. Harrow	82
2. Brent	80
3. Barnet	78
4. Surrey	73
5. Ealing	71
6. Kingston UT	70
7. Hounslow	68
8. Redbridge	68
9. Sutton	67
10. Bromley	66
11. Haringey	64
12. Hertfordshire	63
13. Berkshire	63
14. East Sussex	63
15. Buckinghamshire	63
16. Enfield	62
17. Sefton	62
18. West Sussex	61
19. Oxfordshire	60
20. Calderdale	60
21. Isle of Wight	60
22. Hampshire	60
23. North Yorkshire	59
24. Hillingdon	58
25. Cambridgeshire	58
26. ILEA	58
27. Richmond UT	58
28. Bury	58
29. Bedfordshire	58
30. Croydon	57
31. Cornwall	57
32. Somerset	57
33. Wirral	57
34. Devon	56
35. Kirklees	56
36. North Tyneside	56
37. Wiltshire	55
38. Stockport	55
39. Cheshire	55
40. Warwickshire	55
41. Liverpool	55
42. Kent	55
43. Hereford and Worcester	55
44. Avon	55
45. Lincolnshire	54
46. Merton	54
47. Solihull	54
48. Dorset	54
49. Leicestershire	53
50. Gloucestershire	53
51. Birmingham	52
52. Essex	52
53. Manchester	52
54. Trafford	52
55. Waltham Forest	51
56. Bexley	51
57. Northumberland	51
58. Northamptonshire	51
59. Wigan	51
60. Newham	50
61. Norfolk	50
62. Derbyshire	50
63. Rotherham	50
64. Salop	49
65. St. Helens	49
66. Lancashire	49
67. Havering	49
68. Bradford	48
69. Staffordshire	48
70. Newcastle UT	48
71. Wakefield	47
72. Nottinghamshire	47
73. Dudley	47
74. Cleveland	47
75. Coventry	47
76. Leeds	47
77. Suffolk	46
78. Walsall	46
79. Bolton	46
80. Wolverhampton	46
81. Doncaster	45
82. Sheffield	45
83. Rochdale	45
84. Tameside	45
85. Gateshead	45
86. Salford	45
87. Durham	44
88. South Tyneside	44
89. Sunderland	44
90. Barnsley	44
91. Humberside	43
92. Sandwell	43
93. Cumbria	42
94. Knowsley	40
95. Oldham	40
96. Barking	33

Table B
Distribution of local authorities by age participation rate 16-year-olds (1989-90): Full-time plus part-time day education

Name of LEA	Per cent.
1. Brent	92
2. Harrow	90
3. Isle of Wight	88
4. Surrey	85
5. Ealing	83
6. Barnet	83
7. Redbridge	82
8. Bedfordshire	78
9. Kingston upon Thames	78
10. Sutton	77
11. Haringey	77
12. Oxfordshire	77
13. St. Helens	76
14. Somerset	76
15. Hounslow	76
16. Buckinghamshire	75
17. Hertfordshire	75
18. Calderdale	75
19. Bury	74
20. East Sussex	74
21. Bromley	74
22. Berkshire	74
23. Gloucestershire	73
24. Cornwall	73
25. Warwickshire	73
26. North Yorkshire	73
27. Enfield	72
28. Hampshire	72
29. North Tyneside	72
30. West Sussex	72
31. Wigan	72
32. Cambridgeshire	72
33. Devon	72
34. Trafford	71
35. Lincolnshire	71
36. Cheshire	71
37. Hillingdon	71
38. Leicestershire	71
39. Hereford and Worcester	70
40. Sefton	70
41. Avon	70
42. Nottinghamshire	70
43. Bradford	70
44. Shropshire	69
45. Newham	69
46. Rotherham	69
47. Stockport	69
48. Wirral	69
49. Wiltshire	69
50. Croydon	68
51. Kirklees	68
52. Manchester	68
53. Northumberland	68
54. Coventry	68
55. Lancashire	67
56. Havering	67
57. Suffolk	67
58. Cumbria	67
59. Staffordshire	66
60. Dudley	66
61. Bexley	66
62. Kent	66
63. Derbyshire	66
64. ILEA	66
65. Merton	65
66. Liverpool	65
67. Norfolk	65
68. Dorset	65
69. Northamptonshire	65
70. Rochdale	64
71. Tameside	64
72. Richmond upon Thames	63
73. Bolton	63
74. Solihull	63
75. Gateshead	62
76. Durham	62
77. Essex	62
78. Wolverhampton	62
79. Birmingham	62
80. Humberside	61
81. Cleveland	61
82. Sheffield	61
83. Waltham Forest	61
84. Leeds	60
85. South Tyneside	59
86. Oldham	59
87. Walsall	58
88. Newcastle upon Tyne	58
89. Sandwell	57
90. Doncaster	56
91. Salford	56
92. Barnsley	55
93. Wakefield	55
94. Sunderland	54
95. Knowsley	54
96. Barking	49

Table C
Distribution of local education authorities by age participation rate 17-year-olds (1989-90): Full-time education

Name of LEA	Per cent.
1. Harrow	64
2. Brent	60
3. Barnet	56
4. Surrey	53
5. Ealing	52
6. Buckinghamshire	49
7. Richmond UT	47
8. Kingston UT	47
9. Sutton	47
10. Redbridge	46
11. Isle of Wight	45
12. Sefton	45
13. Bury	44
14. Hertfordshire	44
15. Berkshire	44
16. West Sussex	43
17. North Yorkshire	43
18. Bromley	43
19. Haringey	43
20. Hounslow	43
21. Enfield	43
22. Hampshire	43
23. East Sussex	42
24. Croydon	42
25. Cheshire	41
26. Cornwall	41
27. North Tyneside	41
28. Somerset	41
29. Calderdale	41
30. Oxfordshire	40
31. Cambridgeshire	40
32. Warwickshire	40
33. Hereford and Worcester	40
34. Wirral	40
35. Lincolnshire	40
36. Avon	39
37. Solihull	39
38. Stockport	39
39. Devon	39
40. Gloucestershire	39
41. Dorset	39
42. Kirklees	38
43. Hillingdon	38
44. ILEA	38
45. Merton	38
46. Bedfordshire	38
47. Wigan	38
48. Wiltshire	37

	Per cent.
49. Kent	37
50. Salop	37
51. Leicestershire	37
52. Lancashire	37
53. Derbyshire	36
54. St. Helens	36
55. Northumberland	36
56. Trafford	36
57. Birmingham	36
58. Dudley	35
59. Northamptonshire	35
60. Manchester	35
61. Essex	34
62. Waltham Forest	34
63. Liverpool	34
64. Rotherham	34
65. Bexley	33
66. Staffordshire	33
67. Norfolk	33
68. Nottinghamshire	33
69. Durham	33
70. Bolton	33
71. Cleveland	33
72. Havering	32
73. Sheffield	32
74. Leeds	32
75. Wakefield	32
76. Suffolk	31
77. Tameside	31
78. Newcastle UT	31
79. Newham	30
80. Bradford	30
81. Walsall	30
82. Coventry	30
83. South Tyneside	30
84. Cumbria	30
85. Barnsley	30
86. Wolverhampton	29
87. Rochdale	29
88. Doncaster	29
89. Gateshead	29
90. Humberside	29
91. Salford	29
92. Sunderland	27
93. Sandwell	26
94. Oldham	26
95. Knowsley	22
96. Barking	19

Table D

Distribution of local education authorities by age participation rate 17-year-olds (1989-90): Full-time plus part-time day education

Name of LEA	Per cent.
1. Brent	78
2. Harrow	75
3. Isle of Wight	67
4. Surrey	67
5. Ealing	65
6. Barnet	63
7. Buckinghamshire	63
8. Bury	62
9. St. Helens	61
10. Gloucestershire	61
11. Sutton	60
12. Wigan	60
13. Somerset	59
14. North Yorkshire	58
15. Cheshire	58
16. Hertfordshire	58
17. Cornwall	58
18. Warwickshire	58
19. Hampshire	57
20. Berkshire	57
21. North Tyneside	57
22. Oxfordshire	57
23. Redbridge	57
24. Lincolnshire	56
25. Bedfordshire	56
26. Devon	56
27. Avon	56
28. Hereford and Worcester	56
29. Calderdale	56
30. West Sussex	56
31. Kingston upon Thames	56
32. Shropshire	56
33. East Sussex	55
34. Enfield	55
35. Cambridgeshire	55
36. Haringey	55
37. Trafford	55
38. Sefton	55
39. Lancashire	54
40. Richmond upon Thames	54
41. Hounslow	54
42. Bromley	54
43. Stockport	54
44. Nottinghamshire	54
45. Wirral	53
46. Kirklees	53
47. Wiltshire	53
48. Northumberland	53
49. Rotherham	53
50. Croydon	53
51. Dudley	53
52. Leicestershire	52
53. Bolton	52
54. Solihull	52
55. Staffordshire	52
56. Cumbria	52
57. Derbyshire	52
58. Hillingdon	51
59. Tameside	51
60. Merton	51
61. Dorset	50
62. Kent	50
63. South Tyneside	50
64. Birmingham	49
65. Coventry	49
66. Manchester	49
67. Suffolk	49
68. Northamptonshire	49
69. Norfolk	48
70. Bradford	48
71. Cleveland	48
72. Durham	48
73. Rochdale	48
74. Sheffield	48
75. ILEA	47
76. Newham	47
77. Liverpool	46
78. Humberside	46
79. Oldham	46
80. Wolverhampton	46
81. Essex	45
82. Bexley	45
83. Leeds	45
84. Doncaster	45
85. Havering	45
86. Walsall	45
87. Newcastle UT	44
88. Waltham Forest	44
89. Barnsley	42
90. Gateshead	42
91. Salford	42
92. Sandwell	41
93. Wakefield	41
94. Sunderland	39
95. Knowsley	38
96. Barking	33

Infant Education

26. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the treatment of voluntary aided schools with respect to nursery provision.

Mr. Eggar: Where the governors of a voluntary aided school wish to establish a new nursery unit, they must publish statutory proposals under section 13 of the Education Act 1980. In considering whether these should be approved, the Secretary of State will take into account the circumstances and needs of the school and its surrounding area and the level of grant aid being sought.

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce legislation imposing a statutory duty upon local education authorities to provide for the education of all children to begin in the autumn term of the school year in which they attain their fifth birthday; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No. This country is almost alone in providing compulsory education from as early as five. We believe that the requirements of younger children and their parents are best met by a diversity of provision.

Middle Schools (National Curriculum)

28. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he has made to monitor the implementation of the national curriculum in middle schools.

Mr. Eggar: The implementation of the national curriculum in middle schools is being monitored by Her Majesty's inspectorate and by local education authorities.

Schools Expenditure

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of central administration expenditure per school pupil per year, starting with the highest spending authority, for the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of total combined expenditure per school pupil per year on school meals, central administration, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay, for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: The data for 1991-92, drawn from local education authorities' budget statements published under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988, are still being collected and analysed. I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Schools (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what proportion of the education capital expenditure authorised for schools maintained by local education authorities is attributable to the need to replace and/or refurbish premises which are no longer fit for their purpose in the current planning period;

(2) what additional capital expenditure has been authorised in 1990-91 and 1991-92 in order that local education authorities may provide maintained schools with the accommodation and equipment required to introduce the national curriculum effectively.

Mr. Fallon: Of the £472 million of annual capital guidelines distributed to local education authorities in respect of capital expenditure at county and voluntary controlled schools in 1991-92, £109 million was distributed by formula specifically to contribute towards new replacement and refurbishment work in schools, and a substantial proportion of the balance will also cover such work. Of the £83 million available for grants for capital building work in voluntary aided and special agreement schools in 1991-92 £7·8 million is for new major improvement and replacement work, and a substantial proportion of the balance will likewise go towards such work.

The substantial increases in the amount available for distribution as capital allocations and annual capital guidelines in the last two years will assist local education authorities to provide maintained schools with the accommodation and equipment they require to introduce the national curriculum effectively.

Education Costs (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average cost of educating *(a)* a primary school pupil and *(b)* a secondary school pupil in the local education authorities within Northumberland.

Mr. Fallon: In 1988-89, the latest year for which information is available, information returned by Northumberland local education authority indicates that its average net institutional expenditure was £1,090 per nursery and primary pupil and £1,630 per secondary pupil. Net institutional expenditure covers the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the costs of central administration, school meals and capital expenditure.

Refugees

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which local authorities have applied, under section 210 of the Education Reform Act 1988, for a grant to *(a)* finance existing provision for refugees or displaced persons living in camps or reception centres and *(b)* finance provision for 1991-92; how many of *(a)* and *(b)* have received a grant; what is the amount of grant allocated to each local authority; and if he will review the grant available for these purposes in the light of the increased number of asylum seekers entering the United Kingdom in 1990.

Mr. Eggar: In 1991-92 Derbyshire, Kirklees, Oxfordshire, Richmond and Surrey sought continued grant to support existing provision for refugees or displaced persons living in camps or reception centres. Camden, Hackney, Hillingdon and Lambeth applied for grant to support new work starting in 1991-92. Richmond also applied for grant to expand its existing provision. The expenditure to be supported in these authorities is as follows:

	£000s
(a)	
Derbyshire	74·2
Kirklees	84·0
Oxfordshire	65·9
Richmond	56·7
Surrey	40·9
(b)	
Camden	36·3
Hackney	34·4
Hillingdon	19·7
Lambeth	77·7

Mixed-age Classes

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of third-year infants are in mixed-age classes where seven-year-olds are in a minority.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is not available.

Conductive Education

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the south-east retail group of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd. about the threatened closure of a positive achievement through conductive education centre; what reply is being sent; if any action will be taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Representations have been received from the south-east retail group of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd. concerning the positive achievement through conductive education centre. A reply has been sent which has made clear that, whilst the Government believe that conductive education for those children who are able to benefit from it should in time be made available in this country, this is a matter for local provision.

Thames Polytechnic (Merger)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for what reasons he has not approved the merger of the South West London college and Thames polytechnic.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has consulted South West London college and other institutions about advice from the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council that student preferences should be taken into account in determining the future location of work at the college. He hopes to make a final decision about the future of the college shortly.

Voluntary Aided and Controlled Sector

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has for the voluntary aided and the voluntary controlled sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: We are firmly committed to the dual system of county and voluntary schools and we value the contribution of the churches to state education. Overall capital expenditure on church schools on a per pupil basis increased by 80 per cent. in real terms between 1979-80 and 1990-91.

We have no proposals to make significant changes to the status of the voluntary schools sector, beyond the plans announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 21 March to transfer voluntary sixth form colleges to a new sector of post-16 education from April 1993. These colleges will retain their voluntary status.

HEALTH

Northumberland Area Services

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in *(a)* Blyth Valley and *(b)* Northumberland were received into local authority care where the specific cause was family homelessness, in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Figures for the numbers of children in care of local authorities are not available centrally for county districts. The latest figures available about children in care in Northumberland are for the year ending 31 March 1990.

Northumberland

Year ending 31 March	*Number of children admitted to care under section 2 of the Child Care Act 1990 where family homelessness was the specific cause*
1979	4
1980	6
1981	2
1982	3
1983	1
1984	6
1985	0
1986	0
1987	0
1988	1
1989	0
1990	2

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of beds available to national health service patients within the Northumberland health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: At 31 March 1990, the latest date for which this information is held centrally, there were 3,014 such beds.

Since 1979, the number of beds has fallen by 25 per cent. but the number of patients treated has increased by around 17 per cent.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names, addresses and qualifications of the directors of the Northumberland Ambulance Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trust boards are made up of equal numbers of executive and non-executive directors and a chairman. The appointment of the executive directors is a matter for the trust.

The chairman and non-executive members of the Northumbria ambulance national health service trust are:

Mr. Roy Stewart
Mr. P. Moth
Dr. J. Higson

Mr. A. Ferguson
Mr. A. Knight
Mr. D. Smith

The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the NHS trust for further details.

Convalescent Homes

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on *(a)* the provision of residential homes for short-term post-operative surgical convalescence and *(b)* the availability of advice and information on the placing of patients in such homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received no such representations. Guidance on discharge procedures is provided for local health authorities in circular HC(89)5 "Discharge of Patients from Hospital" and its accompanying booklet of good practice, copies of which are available in the Library.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the awards given to voluntary organisations under the section 64 procedure for the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1990-91 grants totalling £14·8 million were awarded under the section 64 general scheme to 262 voluntary organisations. This represents a real-terms increase of 43 per cent. over 1978-79. Details of the grants are given in the following table.

In 1991-92 we plan to increase the level of support to the voluntary sector under the section 64 general scheme by a further £1·1 million to £15·9 million. So far grants to the value of £11 million have been awarded to 238 voluntary organisations. Further grants will be awarded throughout the year. Existing "core" grants which help to fund headquarters running costs will generally be held more or less steady to enable us to extend the support which we can give to the voluntary sector through new core grants and project funding. Significant core grants have already been renewed for such bodies as Alcohol Concern, Age Concern, MIND and the Disabled Living Foundation. Major new projects funded this year under the section 64 general scheme include ones undertaken by Mental Health Foundation—Homeless in London (£80,000), National Institute for Social Work (£55,000), Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (£27,000) and East London Asian Family Counselling (£24,000).

These figures and the number and range of organisations supported clearly demonstrate Ministers' commitment to the voluntary sector. They also underline the Government's recognition of the special and valuable contribution which voluntary organisations bring to the provision of health and personal social services.

Grants to voluntary organisations under s.64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968—General Scheme (Subhead E2(1)A) 1990-91 provisional outturn

	£
Access Committee (England)	122,000
Action for Dysphasic Adults	16,580
Action for Victims of Medical Accidents	20,000
Action on Smoking and Health	241,500
ADFAM	18,375
Age Concern	254,000
Age Exchange Theatre Company	10,000
AIDS Ahead	40,000
AIDS Care Education and Training (ACET)	100,000
Alcohol Concern	583,000
Aied Richards Trust	35,100
Alzheimer's Disease Society	130,000
Amarant Trust	13,400
Amnesia Association	8,000
Anna Freud Centre	5,000
Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus	34,919
Association for Stammerers	10,000
Association for the Psychiatric Study of Adolescents	20,000
Association of Breastfeeding Mothers	3,775
Association of Disabled Professionals	3,000
Association of Professions for the Mentally Handicapped	5,000
Association of Residential Care	20,000
Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability	36,000
Association to Combat Huntington's Chorea	10,000
Barnardos	55,625
Black HIV/AIDS Network (BHAN)	40,000
Body Positive	40,000
Breakthrough Trust	40,000
Breastcare and Mastectomy Association of Great Britain	32,000
Bridge	35,000
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering	285,000
British Association for Counselling	69,470
British Association for Services to the Elderly	12,000
British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN)	27,500
British Association of Cancer United Patients (BACUP)	23,000
British Association of the Hard of Hearing	60,000
British Council of Organisations of Disabled People	30,000
British Fluoridation Society	33,000
British Infertility Counselling Association	3,200
British Institute of Industrial Therapy	25,000
British Institute of Mental Handicap	35,000
British Kidney Patient Association	25,000
British Organ Donor Society	5,000
Brittle Bones Society	8,000
Brook Advisory Centres	65,000
Cancer Help Centre	30,000
Cancer Research Campaign	18,000
Cancerlink	18,000
Care and Repair Limited	30,500
Care Resources for People Affected by AIDS/HIV (CARA)	15,000
Carers National Association	105,000
Catholic Child Welfare Council	2,500
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	42,200
Centre for Accessible Environment	70,000
Chest Heart and Stroke Association	71,163
Child Accident Prevention Trust	106,050
Child Care	184,035
Child Migrants Trust	20,000
Child Poverty Action Group	18,000
Child Psychotherapy Trust	50,000
Childline	82,200
Children's Legal Centre	45,000
Chinese Health Information Centre	16,000
Christian Concern for the Mentally Handicapped	11,000
Coeliac Society	14,500
Community Hygiene Concern	5,000
Compassionate Friends	20,000
Contact	32,000
Contact a Family	90,000
Coronary Prevention Group	87,500
Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People	60,000
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme Ltd.	80,000
Cruse	142,000
Cry-Sis	4,000
Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust	22,000
Dial UK	45,000
Disability Alliance	45,000

	£
Disabled Housing Trust	17,000
Disabled Living Centres Council	20,000
Disabled Living Foundation	347,255
Disabled Living Services Manchester	10,000
Disablement Income Group	40,000
Down's Syndrome Association	15,000
Dystonia Society	6,920
Eating Disorders Association (was Anorexic Family Aid)	24,167
Elizabeth Fitzroy Homes	25,000
Endometriosis Society	10,000
Ethnic Study Group	66,000
Extend	25,000
Family Planning Association	165,000
Family Policy Studies Centre	100,000
Family Rights Group	36,000
Family Service Units	245,000
Family Welfare Asssociation	136,000
First Key	118,832
Foundation for Conductive Education	45,579
Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths	25,000
Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD)	20,000
Friends for the Young Deaf	10,000
Frontliners	50,000
Gingerbread	84,500
Good Practice in Mental Health	80,000
Graves Medical Audiovisual Library	10,000
Haemophilia Society	15,500
Headway Association	40,000
Heartline Association	5,000
Herpes Association	15,000
Holiday Care Service	15,000
Home Farm Trust	20,000
Home Start Consultancy	70,000
Homes for Homeless People	48,000
Horticultural Therapy	58,300
Housing Campaign for Single Homeless	36,500
Hypogammaglobulinaemia Society	4,500
In Touch	3,000
Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence	348,000
Institute of Transcultural Health Care	1,000
International Social Service	53,208
Iris Fund	2,500
Jewish Welfare Board	5,000
Joint Committee on Mobility for the Disabled	1,100
Jubilee Sailing Trust	20,000
Kids	25,000
Kids Clubs Network	88,500
Kings Fund Centre for Health Services Development	30,000
La Leche League of Great Britain	8,000
Landmark South London HIV Centre	79,000
L'Arche Ltd.	12,000
Leisure Link	7,500
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	18,750
London Black Womens Health Action Project	3,000
London Chinese Health Resource Centre	30,000
London Lighthouse	300,000
MacFarlane Trust	140,000
Mainliners	40,000
Making Space (was North West Fellowship)	30,000
Manic Depression Fellowship	10,000
Marfan Association	5,000
Marie Curie Memorial Foundation	20,000
Maternity Alliance	37,000
MENCAP	250,000
Menieres Society	5,000
Mental After Care Association	50,000
Mental Health Foundation	50,000
Mental Health Media Council	30,000
Migraine Trust	8,000
Mildmay Mission Hospital	130,000
Miscarriage Association	4,000
Mobility Information Service	8,000
Motor Neurone Disease Association	10,000
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association	10,000
NAFSIYAT	15,000

	£
National AIDS Trust	211,000
National Association for Maternal and Child Welfare	15,000
National Association for Mental Health (MIND)	454,960
National Association for Patient Participation	7,000
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO)	270,000
National Association for the Childless	39,300
National Association for the Limbless Disabled	22,500
National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital	91,914
National Association of Family Based Respite Care	4,000
National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends	24,000
National Asthma Campaign	15,000
National Back Pain Association	21,000
National Childbirth Trust	64,000
National Childminding Association	130,000
National Children's Bureau	364,488
National Citizens Advocacy	20,000
National Community Health Resource	55,000
National Council for One parent Families	150,000
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)	135,390
National Counselling and Welfare Service for Sick Doctors	1,700
National Federation of Kidney Patients	10,000
National Fostercare Association	100,000
National Information for Parents of Prematures (NIPPERS)	11,000
National Information Forum	16,000
National Institute for Social Work	165,500
National Joint Emergency Executive Committee (Red Cross/St. John Ambulance)	25,000
National Meningitis Trust	15,000
National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees & Parents (NORCAP)	8,093
National Osteoporosis Society	20,000
National Playbus Association	54,000
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	140,860
National Self Help Support Centre	40,000
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	150,000
National Stepfamily Association	20,000
National Toy Libraries	45,000
National Youth Bureau	69,000
Neurofibromatosis Association (LINK)	5,000
New Horizons Trust	10,000
Newcastle upon Tyne Council for the Disabled	5,500
North Regional Association for the Blind	67,619
Northern Schizophrenia Fellowship	27,500
Outset	25,000
Overseas Doctors Association	17,000
Pain Relief Foundation	8,500
Parent to Parent Information on Adoption Services	6,500
Parentline Opus	40,000
Parents Against Injustice (PAIN)	35,000
Parents for Children	48,500
Partially Sighted Society	10,000
Patients Association	20,000
Phobic Action	20,000
Phobics Society	7,500
Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied	30,000
Positively Women	40,000
Pre-School Playgroups Association	420,000
Prince of Wales Advisory Group on Disability	75,000
Queen Elizabeth Foundation for the Disabled	36,000
Rainer Foundation	26,700
Rape Counselling and Research Project	20,000
Raynaud's Association Trust	6,000
Research Trust for Metabolic Diseases	5,000
Restricted Growth Association	12,500
Richmond Fellowship	97,000
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)	225,000
Royal National Institute for the Blind	200,000

	£
Royal National Institute for the Deaf	40,000
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)	5,000
Samaritans	155,000
Save the Children Fund	71,000
Scoliosis Association UK	1,000
Sense (NADBRH)	65,000
Sequal	25,000
Sickle Cell Society	35,000
Skills for People	11,000
South Regional Association for the Blind	127,577
St. Katherine Housing Trust	18,000
Standing Committee on Sexual Abuse of Children (SCOSAC)	20,000
Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA)	277,500
Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)	30,000
Street[illegible]e Youth	10,000
Sup[illegible] After Termination for Abnormality	5,000
T[illegible]	10,000
[illegible]nstock Clinic Foundation	14,070
[illegible]y Sachs and Allied Diseases Association	5,000
[illegible]erence Higgins Trust	450,000
Thalassamenia Society	15,000
Tibble Trust	1,500
Tracheo Oesophageal Fistula Support (TOFS)	3,000
Tripscope	4,000
Tuberous Sclerosis Association	2,000
Turning Point	110,000
Twins and Multiple Births Association (TAMBA)	7,750
United Response	25,000
Values Into Action (was Campaign for Mentally Handicapped)	20,000
Vitiligo	4,000
Vocal	15,000
Voice for the Child in Care	10,000
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children	60,000
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Committee for Under Fives (VOLCUF)	36,000
Walsingham Community Homes	10,000
Wessex Rehabilitation Association	7,500
Westminster Pastoral Foundation	60,000
Widows Advisory Trust	18,000
Winged Fellowship Trust	15,000
Women's Aid Federation (England)	130,000
Women's Health Concern	20,000
Women's National Cancer Control Campaign	32,000
Womens Therapy Centre	15,000
Working Mothers Association	15,000
Young Minds	10,000
Total paid[1]	£14,771,124

[1] This total includes £50,000 paid to Voluntary Organisations for Europe Against Cancer.

Gulf Casualties

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *397*, when he expects to receive and validate the final figures from regional health authorities in respect of Gulf casualties.

Mr. Dorrell: Regional health authorities have been asked to submit final figures for the costs they incurred in making preparations to treat casualties. We expect that final figures will be received and validated within a few weeks.

Nurses' Grading

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects nursing clinical grading appeals in Northumberland health authority to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not held centrally on district level appeals.

Creuzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to establish a counselling service for those individuals who may have been infected with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease by the use of contaminated growth hormone, and the families of those individuals;

(2) what steps his Department has taken to notify all those individuals who may have been infected with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease from injections of contaminated growth hormones of the nature of their position;

(3) if his Department has successfully identified all those individuals who may have become infected with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease from injection of contaminated growth hormone.

Mr. Dorrell: Those at risk were the 1,908 patients treated with human pituitary derived growth hormone in clinical trials conducted between 1959 and 1985. From records kept of these trials, 1,699 patients have been identified as currently resident in Great Britain. Of these, 80 per cent. have been traced and their general practitioner notified. We expect that a substantial number of the remaining patients will be traced over the next few weeks.

The GPs are asked if they wish to advise their patients of the risk or if they would prefer the approach to be made by hospital specialists. If the doctors requested further help with counselling we would consider what additional assistance we could provide.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations and practices have been instituted since 1985 to ensure that those infected with diseases such as Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease through the use of contaminated products are informed at the earliest possible opportunity of their condition.

Mr. Dorrell: These instances are rare and the complex clinical and ethical issues that determine how best to proceed need to be considered in each instance. Generally, we believe that the doctors involved in treatment are best placed to decided when and how to convey such information.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals have been infected with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease by the use of contaminated growth hormone.

Mr. Dorrell: At present, there is no specific test for Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in the living patient and diagnosis can be confirmed only in post-mortem histological examination. Post-mortems carried out on 110 patients treated in the trials of human-derived growth hormone show that six died with CJD. I am advised that the great majority of the remaining patients treated in the trials are unlikely to have been infected.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has successfully identified all those batches of growth hormone that were infected by Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mr. Dorrell: On the basis of current knowledge it is not possible to identify which batches of human-derived

growth hormone used in the clinical trials conducted between 1959 and 1985 were infected with Creutzfeldt Jakob disease. Human-derived material has not been used since 1985, when a genetically engineered hormone treatment became available.

General Practitioners

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many general practitioners in Britain with over 3,000 patients on their list are working single-handed;

(2) how many general practitioners in Britain have over 3,000 patients on their list.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 1 October 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 2,585 general practitioners in England with a personal list size of over 3,000 patients, of whom 373 are working single-handed. The information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries for State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider amending the regulations to provide that the maximum number of patients for whom any doctor can receive payment is 2,500.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. List sizes have been falling steadily for a number of years, with the average now below 2,000.

Eye Tests

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of eye tests taken by men over 65 years and women over 60 years for each year since 1987.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not collected on the age of adults receiving national health service sight tests.

Medical Products (Contamination)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken since 1985 to screen all products such as growth hormones for contamination by serious disease.

Mr. Dorrell: The Medicines Control Agency, which is responsible for the grant of licences under the Medicines Act 1968, requires that applicants for licences supply scientific information to support the application. The agency has issued guidance on the selection of human and animal-derived materials used in the manufacture of medicinal products. Manufacturers are expected to apply appropriate criteria for selecting the sources of such material including screening tests so that contaminated material may be excluded. The agency evaluates data submitted in support of applications with advice, when required, from expert advisory committees set up under the Medicines Act.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding the nature and extent of screening of blood products by the blood transfusion service for contamination by highly infectious diseases.

Mr. Dorrell: In the interests of maintaining the safety of the blood supply, all potential donors are advised not to donate blood or plasma if they consider that they are in one of the high-risk groups for infectious diseases. Additional specific groups are also excluded—such as recipients of human growth hormone, although there is no evidence that Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease infection is transmitted by blood or blood products.

In addition, all blood and plasma donations collected by the National Blood Transfusion Service are routinely tested for HIV 1 and HIV 2, hepatitis B and syphilis. These arrangements are kept under review in the light of any new developments. The Blood Transfusion Service is currently evaluating tests for the hepatitis C antibody and it is expected that routine tests for hepatitis C will be introduced from September 1991.

All factor VIII and IX produced from screened and tested donations are heat treated to inactivate HIV and other viruses. Blood itself cannot be heat treated.

Schoolchildren (Blood Lead Levels)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by place and date all his Department's surveys into lead levels in the blood of schoolchildren since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has not carried out any such surveys. However, surveys have been commissioned by the Department of the Environment (DOE) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) which is the main agency through which the Government support bio-medical and clinical research in the United Kingdom.

The DOE has published the results of the surveys it has commissioned in its Pollution Report Series "United Kingdom Blood Lead Monitoring Programme, 1984-1987". Report No. 28 (1990) summarises all the results for 1984-87. Details of the results for 1984-1986 are given in reports 22, 24 and 26. Copies of all these reports are available in the Library.

The surveys show a progressive fall in children's blood lead levels.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS Estates Agency was launched on 1 April 1991. In a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) on 17 April at column *204*, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that the Medicines Control Agency had been identified as a candidate for executive agency status. Further candidates are being considered.

Romanian Children

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children from Romania his Department has recommended for entry clearance for adoption in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since December 1989, the Department has recommended to the Home Office that entry clearance should be authorised in respect of 206

Romanian children for adoption in England. Information relating to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales.

Cleveland Child Abuse Inquiry

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which categories of persons or bodies received funding from his Department in respect of the inquiry into child abuse in Cleveland in 1987; what were the purposes for which funding was made available; what was the total amount of expenditure incurred by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department gave funds of £300,000 each to the Cleveland county council and the Northern regional health authority in respect of the inquiry into child abuse in 1987. The payments were made in recognition of the exceptional length of the inquiry to assist the local authority and health authority with the costs which they incurred; the total expenditure incurred by the Department including these payments which can be separately identified was about £1·25 million.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information on the salaries of the executive directors of national health service trusts will be included in the trusts' annual reports.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Annual financial statements for each trust will show the number of employees, including executive directors, receiving remuneration of over £40,000 in bands of £5,000. These statements will also show the emoluments of the highest paid board member separately and the number of board members receiving emoluments in bands of £5,000 with no lower limit.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits and Allowances

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the saving if no social security, housing, or welfare benefits other than child benefit were paid to any single person whose income was more than £65 per week and to couples married or otherwise whose income was more than £130 per week.

Mr. Jack: The estimated savings in the income-related benefits are in the table.

	Savings (£ million)
Income Support	5
Family Credit	210
Housing Benefit	240
Community Charge Benefit	60

Comparable details are not held for benefits which are not income related and it is not therefore possible to give estimates for them.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the total anticipated costs of the Benefits Agency, including uniforms and office alterations.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Marginal Tax Rates

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the numbers of lower-paid families with and without children showing one and two-parent families with children separately, whose marginal tax rates, including benefit withdrawal, will be *(a)* 90 to 100 per cent., *(b)* 80 to 90 per cent., *(c)* 70 to 80 per cent., *(d)* 60 to 70 per cent., *(e)* 50 to 60 per cent. and *(f)* 40 to 50 per cent., taking into account the tax changes for 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table.

Marginal deduction rates including Social Security
Numbers with marginal deduction rates within each range (thousands) Great Britain

Per cent.	*Couples with children*	*Single parents*	*Others*
90 to 99	25	30	0
80 to 89	95	35	15
70 to 79	80	55	50
60 to 69	—[1]	—[1]	—[1]
50 to 59	0	0	0
40 to 49	5	0	15

Figures are based on pooled Family Expenditure Survey data.
Calculated for benefit units in receipt of income-related benefits where at least one partner works 24 hours per week or more.
[1] Denotes less than 5,000.

Claimants, Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many adults in *(a)* Blyth Valley or *(b)* Northumberland over the age of 18 years were in receipt of income support for 1990-91.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many poll tax payers in the Blyth Valley district council area will lose rebate arising out of the proposed reduction in the poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are receiving family credit in the areas covered by his Department's Blyth Valley offices.

Mr. Jack: The administration of family credit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the

Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Support

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants had direct deductions for gas, electricity, rent arrears, poll tax arrears, water rates and social fund loans in 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: Figures for May 1989 are contained in table 10 of the "Department of Social Security Income Support Statistics Annual Statistical Inquiry, May 1989", a copy of which is in the Library. There were no deductions for community charge at that time. Figures for the numbers of claimants with deductions in May 1990 will be published shortly.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families with children were in receipt of income support in each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support was introduced in April 1988 when it replaced supplementary benefit. The numbers of families with children under the age of 16 years receiving those benefits since 1979 is in the table:

	Thousands
November 1979	477
December 1980	567
December 1981	777
December 1982	907
December 1983	948
December 1984	1,031
February 1986	1,137
May 1987	1,138
May 1988	1,119
May 1989	1,106

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.
Note: There was no Annual Statistical Enquiry in 1985: the one due in December that year was deferred until February 1986.

Social Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the gross and net budgets of the social fund for each year since its introduction for *(a)* the Greenock and Port Glasgow local offices, *(b)* local offices in Strathclyde and *(c)* local offices in Scotland; and if he will break down these budgets into (i) crisis loans, (ii) budgeting loans and (iii) community care grants and showing the change in real terms since 1988-89.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current practice of the mobility allowance unit in respect of the period for which mobility allowance to disabled people is awarded; and what is the relationship between the period of award and eligibility for the mobility scheme.

Mr. Scott: Decisions on eligibility and the duration of an award are for independent adjudicating authorities in accordance with the appropriate legislation. The minimum period awarded is one year and the maximum is until the disabled person reaches age 80.

The minimum period of award required to take advantage of the motability scheme is three years for a leased vehicle. To purchase on hire purchase requires an award of two years for a second-hand vehicle, or four years for a new one.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's policies on the award of mobility and attendance allowance pending the introduction of disability allowance in 1992; and whether he has any information on the number of people currently receiving mobility allowance who will receive the lower rate of allowance when the new disability allowance is introduced.

Mr. Scott: Awards of attendance allowance and mobility allowance will continue to be made on the same basis as they are now until disability living allowance is introduced in April 1992. People who are in receipt of mobility allowance at the point of change will be automatically transferred to the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Poll Tax Deductions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *29*, to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), what is the estimated cost to public funds of administering in the week of February containing the quarterly day, the 28th, the deductions from 36,448 people's income support to cover poll tax arrears; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information office.

Correspondence

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter sent to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East in answer to his question of 1 May, *Official Report*, column *255*.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the letter by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to all right hon. and hon. Members about the arrangements for handling parliamentary questions concerning operational matters within the remit of the Benefits Agency. In accordance with the terms of that letter, a copy of Mr. Bichard's reply to the hon. Member of 8 May, which set out the information requested in considerable detail, has been placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Next Steps

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the criteria for selecting those matters within his responsibility and the responsibility of the next steps agencies which are deemed to be operational matters.

Miss Widdecombe: The responsibilities of chief executives of DSS agencies on operational matters are set out in the framework document for each agency, copies of which are available in the Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all right hon. and hon. Members about the new arrangements we were introducing for Members' correspondence and written parliamentary questions about the operational activities of DSS agencies. The arrangements are designed to provide a better service to Members. Ministers remain fully accountable for the work of the Department including its executive agencies.

Information Technology Services Agency

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the chief executive at the Information Technology Services Agency will meet NVCPS, CPSA, and other staff unions to discuss the agency's first-year business plan; when the second-year business plan will be published; and when the fifth-year strategic plan will be published.

Miss Widdecombe: Consultation with staff unions and the publication of agency business and strategic plans are matters for Mr. John Kenworthy, the chief executive of the Information Technology Services Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were promoted by the Industrial Development Board in each of the 17 parliamentary constituencies during the years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Parliamentary constituency	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Belfast, East	106	74
Belfast, North	23	—
Belfast, South	82	973
Belfast, West	496	119
East Antrim	651	129
East Londonderry	166	40
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	212	619
Foyle	827	371
Lagan Valley	85	288
Mid Ulster	150	388
Newry and Armagh	34	160
North Antrim	246	460
North Down	425	—
South Antrim	1,068	185
South Down	56	72
Strangford	87	50
Upper Bann	417	474

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time speech therapists are currently employed by each health board in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Details of the number of speech therapists employed by each health and social services board in Northern Ireland at 31 March 1991 are as follows:

Health and social services board	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Eastern	64	19
Northern	30	13
Southern	20	4
Western	25	1
TOTAL	139	37

Since 1981, the number of speech therapists in Northern Ireland has risen from 118 (whole-time equivalent 100·58) to 176 (whole-time equivalent 158·30) an increase in real terms of 57·38 per cent.

Belvoir Park Estate, Castlereagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the criteria for membership of the Wednesday club for the elderly in the community centre in Belvoir park estate in the borough of Castlereagh.

Mr. Hanley: The management of the Wednesday club for the elderly in the Belvoir park estate is the responsibility of the eastern health and social services board. When I have received the necessary information from the board, I will write to the right hon. Gentleman and arrange for a copy of my reply to be placed in the Library.

Prisoners

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the prison population of Northern Ireland is nationalist; and what percentage is loyalist.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The information requested is not available.

EMPLOYMENT

Trainees

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of *(a)* ET trainees and *(b)* YT trainees respond to follow-up surveys after completion of their courses.

Mr. Jackson: About 50 per cent. of ET trainees and YT trainees respond to national follow-up surveys. These response rates are very good for such large-scale voluntary postal surveys.

Approved Training Organisations

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many approved training organisations there are in *(a)* Northumberland and *(b)* Blyth Valley; and what are their names.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers and names of approved training organisations in Northumberland and Blyth Valley is a matter for the training and enterprise council to answer. TECs have agreed to ensure that providers secure approved training organisation or equivalent status within a period of time set out in the TEC's agreed business plan.

Work-related Training

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentages of people on work-related Government training programmes are *(a)* aged 18 to 24 years and *(b)* aged 50 years and over.

Mr. Jackson: The proportion of trainees on youth training aged 18 to 24 fluctuates during the year between 10 per cent. and 30 per cent. Thirty-five per cent. of entrants to employment training are in the 18 to 24 age group and 5 per cent. are 51 and over.

Work Accidents

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the calculated incidence rates per 100,000 employees based upon injuries as a result of work activities reported to enforcement authorities in the five counties of the east midlands region for each year since 1986-87 in the categories (i) fatal and major and (ii) over three days in *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* energy, *(c)* manufacturing, *(d)* construction, *(e)* services and *(f)* all industries.

Mr. Forth: The available information is provided in the table below. Analysis by individual counties could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Occupational injuries[1] in the East Midlands Region (incidence rates per 100,000 employees) 1986-87—1989-90 (provisional)

Standard Industrial Classification 1980 Sector	1986-87		1987-88		1988-89		1989-90[6]	
	Fatal + Major[2]	Over 3 Day[3]	Fatal + Major[2]	Over 3 Day[3]	Fatal + Major[2]	Over 3 Day[3]	Fatal + Major[2]	Over 3 Day[3]
Agriculture	[5]116·5	427·2	[5]176·5	568·6	206·2	611·7	183·5	565·5
Energy	[4]73·2	[4]888·7	360·6	2,880·3	419·2	4,589·3	418·3	4,140·1
Manufacturing	138·9	1,121·7	146·5	988·3	136·5	1,096·3	121·9	1,199·5
Construction	185·1	1,478·8	197·4	1,365·4	205·7	1,430·6	215·4	1,710·3
Services	63·1	473·1	56·5	475·8	56·0	462·2	52·9	464·6
All Industries	94·3	743·7	106·5	780·3	104·4	862·6	95·8	871·1

[1] Based on injuries to employees, reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985 (RIDDOR), to all enforcement authorities excluding HSE's Railway Inspectorate.
[2] As defined under RIDDOR.
[3] Injuries causing incapacity for work for more than three days.
[4] Excludes injuries reported to HSE's Inspectorate of Mines and Quarries.
[5] Analysis by county of fatal injuries reported to HSE's Agricultural Inspectorate in 1986-87 and 1987-88 is not available.
[6] —provisional.

HSE Inspectors

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of inspectors employed within the north midlands area of the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1986-87 in *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the mines and quarries inspectorate and *(c)* the agricultural inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given below for 1 April each year.

Year at 1 April	Inspectors in FI	Inspectors in AI	Inspectors in MQI[1 2]
1986	23	10	8
1987	23	11	10
1988	21	11	7
1989	23	12	9
1990	28	9	7
1991	30	9	6

[1] The figures given are for both Mines and Quarries Inspectors although under an internal reorganisation in October 1989 Quarries Inspectors joined Factory and Agricultural Inspectors in a new Division. From that date the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate was renamed the Mines Inspectorate.
[2] Mines Inspectorate is organised into districts whose boundaries differ from those of HSE's areas.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of inspectors employed within the east midlands area of the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1986-87 in *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the mines and quarries inspectorate and *(c)* the agricultural inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: The available information is as follows for 1 April each year.

Year	Inspectors in FI	Inspectors in AI	Quarries Inspectors[1 2]
1986	25·0	9	—
1987	26·0	8	—
1988	24·5	9	—
1989	26·0	9	—
1990	27·0	9	1
1991	30·5	8	1

[1] No Mines and Quarries Inspectors were based within the HSEs East Midlands Area until October 1989 when an internal reorganisation resulted in Quarries Inspectors joining Factory and Agricultural Inspectors in a new Division. From that date the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate was renamed the Mines Inspectorate.
[2] Mines Inspectorate is organised into Districts whose boundaries differ from those of HSEs areas.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Jackson: In April 1990, we established the Employment Service as a next steps agency. The

Employment Service employs some 38,000 people and its aim is to give positive help to unemployed people through job placement services and other programmes, and by payments of benefits and allowances to those entitled to them. It is the second biggest agency to be set up under the next steps initiative.

There are no other candidates for agency status at present. However, we are currently considering the further application of next steps agency status to departmental functions.

Defence Manufacturing

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to assist employees of companies engaged in defence manufacturing to seek alternative employment.

Mr. Jackson: The full range of services and facilities of the Department, the Employment Service and training and enterprise councils is available to assist employees who lose their jobs in the defence industry and other industries to find and train for alternative employment.

Employment Training

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide an analysis of the amount each training and enterprise council has received of the additional £120 million for employment training distributed by the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate; how much remains to be distributed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The additional £120 million for ET in 1991-92 was distributed on the basis of the allocation formulae agreed with the TECs and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for the original distribution of the ET budgets in 1991-92. The £120 million has been fully incorporated into TEC business plans which are commercially confidential.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those travel-to-work areas in England, together with the respective percentages, where 40 per cent. or more of all employees are engaged in production.

Mr. Jackson: The most recent estimates of employees in employment in travel-to-work areas are from the September 1989 census of employment. The travel-to-work areas in England with 40 per cent. or more of employees employed in the production industries are listed in the table below.

Travel-to-work area	*Proportion[1] percentage*
Haverhill	55·4
Pendle	54·2
Barrow-in-Furness	53·5
Corby	51·5
Alfreton and Ashfield	49·9
Chard	47·9
Burnley	46·3
Loughborough and Coalville	45.0
Bishop Auckland	44·9
Retford	44·5
Accrington and Rossendale	44·4
Stoke	44·4
Walsall	44·2
Gainsborough	43·1
Whitehaven	43·0
Oldham	42·7
Uttoxeter and Ashbourne	42·6
Castleford and Pontefract	42·5
Blackburn	41·6
Burton-on-Trent	41·4
Calderdale	41·3
Kidderminster	41·2
Dudley and Sandwell	40·9
Widnes and Runcorn	40·9
Leek	40·5
Telford and Bridgnorth	40·3

[1] Employees in Divisions 1 to 4 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980 as a percentage of all employees in the travel-to-work area.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of all employees in England are employed in *(a)* production and *(b)* services;

(2) what percentage of all employees in (i) the south-east and (ii) the south-west of England are employed in *(a)* production and *(b)* services;

(3) what information he has as to what percentage of all employees in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Germany, (iii) France and (iv) Italy were at the latest available dates, respectively, employed in *(a)* services and *(b)* production.

Mr. Jackson: The information available is shown in the table.

Employees in Employment

	Percentage of Employees in Production Industries	*Percentage of Employees in Service Industries*
December 1990		
England[1]	24·5	69·8
South East[1]	17·9	77·3
South West[1]	22·8	70·6
United Kingdom[1] (December 1990)	24·4	69·6
Germany (F.R.)[2] (June 1986)	37·6	54·5
France[2] (June 1988)	25·8	65·8
Italy[2] (June 1988)	28·9	56·7

[1] *Source:* Employment Department.
[2] *Source:* O.E.C.D. Labour Force Statistics.

Oil Platforms

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the semi-submersible rigs and jack-up structures which require modifications in terms of safety requirements outlined and recommended by the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster and the date by which he expects such work to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Lord Cullen's 106 recommendations include wide-ranging reform of offshore safety legislation, with a new requirement for operators to produce, and have accepted by the Health and Safety Executive, a safety case

for every offshore installation. The report's recommendations apply to both fixed and mobile installations. It is not possible to say in advance what changes any individual installation will be required to make.

I refer the hon. Member also to my answer of 15 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *211-12*.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure by the Training Agency-Manpower Services Commission on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson *[pursuant to his reply, 30 April]:* I regret that the information given in my reply of 30 April, *Official Report*, column *106*, contained an incorrect table. The correct information is as follows.

Year	*Expenditure £ million*
Actual	
1979-80 to 1985-86	n/a
1986-87	1·08
1987-88	1·014
1988-89	3·185
1989-90	3·331
Estimated	
1990-91	3·564

Notes:

Figures for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are for DE Information Division only. Figures for TA are not available.

Figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 represent total expenditure separately incurred by DE information Services Branch; the two merged in November 1989.

(b) Expenditure levels for 1991-92 are in the process of being set.

DEFENCE

Arms Dump, Caerwent

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any assessment has been made of the consequences on the surrounding area and the local population of an aircraft crash on the arms dump at Caerwent, Gwent.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There has been no such specific assessment. However, the base has a comprehensive plan for dealing with all types of emergency, particularly ones involving fire.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of restrictions on flying near and over the arms dump at Caerwent, Gwent.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no special restrictions on civil overflights of RAF Caerwent but military flying regulations take account of potential hazards at this and similar sites.

Low Flying

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of restrictions on low-flying exercises at or near the populated areas of south Gwent.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Aircrew carrying out low-flying exercises in the United Kingdom low-flying system are instructed to avoid overflying the centres of major conurbations and built-up areas and will, where practicable, seek to avoid all populated areas.

Sea Harrier Crash

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instigate a full inquiry into the crash of a Sea Harrier into a hillside at Wentwood, Gwent, on the morning of 10 May.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is standard procedure to convene a naval board of inquiry following an accident involving the loss of a Royal Navy aircraft. This inquiry will determine the cause of the accident and make recommendations on any lessons that may be learnt.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the flying pattern of the Sea Harrier that crashed into a hillside at Caerwent on 10 May, prior to the crash.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The aircraft was one of a group of three conducting a routine low-level reconnaissance sortie. The details of the accident are still being reviewed by a board of inquiry.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Sea Harrier that crashed at Wentwood, Gwent, on 10 May was on a low-flying exercise.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of any emergency landing areas in Gwent that are recommended for use by aircraft in emergencies.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No emergency landing areas for military aircraft are specifically designated in Gwent. In any emergency it would be the reponsibility of the aircraft's captain to select the airfield most suited to deal with his particular circumstances. Details of military and civil airfields and emergency facilities are regularly promulgated.

Military Nuclear Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to order a review of the safety of all facilities currently involved in the production and processing of military nuclear materials.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. All United Kingdom facilities involved in the production and processing of nuclear materials for military purposes are subject to a continuing safety review.

Defence Industry

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *165*, what studies have been carried out regarding the ability of the United Kingdom defence industry to support military operations in the mid-1990s.

Mr. Alan Clark: Studies into the lessons of Operation Granby will include assessments of the United Kingdom defence industry's support for military operations and their implications for the future.

CSBM Negotiations

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *166*, whether any personnel from the Royal Navy have been involved in the negotiations on confidence and security-building measures in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no Royal Navy personnel directly involved in the CSBM negotiations. Naval staffs within the Ministry of Defence are consulted as necessary.

The Gulf

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel have been injured in non-combat accidents in the Gulf since 2 August 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: According to our current records, some 540 armed forces personnel have been injured in non-combat accidents in the Gulf since 2 August 1990. This figure does not include minor injuries to Army personnel during the period up to 16 January 1991 when such injuries were not subject to central recording, nor does it include casualties who subsequently died.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March about Operation Granby, *Official Report*, column *165*, what is the approximate number of combat sorties carried out from the commencement of the air campaign that were *(a)* ground attack missions and *(b)* air defence missions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During hostilities in the Gulf, RAF Tornado GR1, Jaguar GR1 and Buccaneer aircraft flew some 2,400 sorties against targets in Iraq and Kuwait. RAF Tornado F3s flew about 700 air defence sorties.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate number of *(a)* ground attack sorties, *(b)* tactical transport sorties and *(c)* non-combat sorties carried out by the Army Air Corps during Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement about army Air Corps operations during Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I regret that information on Army Air Corps activity was not recorded in the form requested. Army Air Corps Lynx and Gazelle helicopters were used during the allied operations to liberate Kuwait. During the night of 26 February, when 1st (British) Armoured Division was engaging an Iraqi armoured division, two Lynx, operating with two Gazelles, are believed to have destroyed four Iraqi tanks and three armoured personnel carriers.

Defence Quality Assurance (Headquarters)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision about the relocation of the headquarters of the directorate general of defence quality assurance.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A decision about the relocation of the directorate general defence quality assurance headquarters will be made as soon as possible after completion of the current studies.

RNAS Coulport

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the floating jetty, at present under construction at Hunterston, will be placed in an operational condition at Royal Naval Auxiliary Service Coulport; if any revisions have had to be made in terms of the date of completion of the contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The explosives handling jetty construction programme has been subject to some delay, and we are currently examining what further steps are necessary in order to maintain the programme.

SCOTLAND

Elderly Forums

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support the Scottish Office has provided to elderly forums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend currently provides financial assistance to three elderly forums through the urban programme at a cost of £99,000 in 1991-92. They are in Strathclyde, Renfrew and Edinburgh. The funding over a period of four years represents 75 per cent. of the cost of the projects.

Scottish Homes

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward provisions which will enable Scottish Homes to claw back any subsidy given to transferred Scottish Homes housing stock which is subsequently sold on the open market and which thereby generates a windfall profit.

Mr. Lang: No. Scottish Homes already has the power to impose conditions on any financial assistance which it may provide in this connection. It is for it as owner of the stock to determine appropriate arrangements for clawback in the event of a subsequent disposal.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward provisions to ensure that in assessing the continuing need for transferred Scottish Homes housing stock to remain available for affordable commercial renting, Scottish Homes will be required to take account of the recommendations of the district councils in their role as statutory local housing authorities.

Mr. Lang: No. Scottish Homes has already been given guidance on the need to consult local authorities and to give careful consideration to their views. Scottish Homes in putting forward any proposals for the Secretary of State's consent will be expected to draw attention to any impact on the local authority's interest and on the authority's capacity to meet its continuing statutory housing obligations.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether valuations on Scottish Homes' housing stock will take account of any burdens on its disposal.

Mr. Lang: Valuation of Scottish Homes' housing stock which is to be disposed to a new landlord will be set by the

district valuer who will take into account the market value subject to existing tenancies, the condition of the stock and the fact that tenants transferring will have a preserved right to buy.

Community Charge Relief

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people successfully claimed personal community charge transitional relief in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990-91 in each islands and district council area in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Regional and island councils are required to provide information on the numbers of people who qualified for relief under the original and the enhanced transitional relief schemes. Information about qualifiers in district council areas is not available centrally. The table shows provisional figures provided by local authorities of qualifiers in 1989-90. The scheme was revised in January 1991 with backdated effect to 1 April 1990. In practice, only one authority paid out relief in respect of the financial year 1990-91 before the scheme was replaced by the personal community charge reduction scheme. Figures for 1990-91 are not therefore available.

	1989-90
Borders	1,655
Central	4,679
Dumfries and Galloway	2,664
Fife	16,202
Highland	9,211
Lothian	78,795
Strathclyde	157,000
Tayside	25,833
Grampian	9,668
Shetland	166
Orkney	—
Western Isles	313

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each year since 1970-71, at fixed prices total expenditure on the national health service, further breaking it down into expenditure on *(a)* health board administration and *(b)* hospital and community services, distinguishing (1) capital and (2) revenue, *(c)* family practitioner services, *(d)* central health services, distinguishing (1) capital and (2) revenue, *(e)* state hospital (1) capital and (2) revenue, *(f)* training, *(g)* research, *(h)* disabled service, *(i)* welfare foods and *(j)* miscellaneous.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information in the format requested is not available.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the expenses incurred by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Ayrshire and Arran health board in connection with the application for self-governing status by the South Ayrshire hospitals trust.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of preparing and printing the application is of the order of £20,000. This will ensure that copies are widely available to interested parties during the statutory consultation period. The cost is being met from additional resources available for implementation of the NHS reforms.

Children (Special Needs)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of places available each year since 1979 in *(a)* list G schools, *(b)* list D schools and *(c)* children's homes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about the number of places at schools entered in list G is not collected annually. There are currently around 15,000 such places.

The list D category was abolished from 1 April 1986. From that date, former list D schools were included in the statistical returns as children's homes. The number of places in such schools up to 1986 was as follows.

	Places
1979	1,585
1980	1,509
1981	1,514
1982	1,349
1983	1,203
1984	1,099
1985	1,107
1986	857

The number of places in children's homes was as follows.

	Places
1979	5,062
1980	5,049
1981	4,669
1982	4,301
1983	3,836
1984	3,442
1985	3,043
1986	2,661
1987	[1]2,995
1988	[1]2,916

[1] Includes former list D schools.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those travel-to-work areas, together with the respective percentages, where 40 per cent. or more of all employees are employed in production.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The most recent estimates of employees in employment in travel-to-work areas are from the September 1989 census of employment. The travel-to-work areas in Scotland with 40 per cent. or more of employees employed in the production industries are listed in the table.

Travel-to-work areas in Scotland where 40 per cent. or more of all employees in employment were employed in the production industries

Travel-to-work area	*Percentage of employees[1] employed in production*
Alloa	42·8
Annan	47·5
Fraserburgh	43·8
Hawick	51·4
Keith	48·9
Peterhead	41·1

Source: Employment Department 1989 Census of Employment.

[1] Employees in employment in divisions 1 to 4 of the 1980 standard industrial classification as a percentage of all employees in employment in the travel-to-work area.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of all employees in Scotland are employed in *(a)* production and *(b)* services.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In December 1990, the latest date for which information is available, 23·4 per cent. of Scottish employees in employment were employed in the production industries and 68·3 per cent. in services.

Legal Aid

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of households eligible for legal aid in court proceedings and the percentage of those entitled who had to make a contribution to legal costs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of individuals who have qualified for legal aid; and what percentage of the population this represents.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not available in the form requested. Figures for the number of legal aid applications granted are set out below.

Year	*Total number of Legal Aid applications granted*	*Total number of Legal Aid applications granted as a percentage of population*
1981-82	186,603	3·6
1982-83	196,093	3·8
1983-84	211,437	4·1
1984-85	221,289	4·3
1985-86	239,985	4·7
1986-87	258,690	5·0
1987-88	306,276	6·0
1988-89	290,053	5·7
1989-90	300,422	5·9
1990-91	[1]—	[1]—

[1] At present these figures are not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by year for the past 10 years the number of people entitled to free legal advice.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on access to free legal services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Legal services paid for under legal aid schemes are available free of charge to all those who satisfy the relevant merits tests and whose means are such that they are not required to make a financial contribution towards their legal costs.

Unfitness to Plead

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his intention to introduce legislative provisions akin to those contained in the Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend keeps under review the law on mentally disturbed offenders in Scotland, and in that context will consider the implications of any changes to the law in this area which may be enacted for England and Wales.

Fish Processing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many fish processing units are currently in operation, by Scottish region; and of these how many currently meet new EC hygiene requirements;

(2) what expenditure his Department expects to be necessary in each year until 1995 in the fish processing sector to meet EC hygiene regulations; what assistance is available for such investments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the form requested is not available. There are known to be over 300 fish processing units in Scotland, the majority of which are located in the Grampian region. Many fish processors already operate to standards above those that will be required under the draft EC fish hygiene directive because of the standards required by the customers. Others are already investing to bring themselves up to a higher standard. The transitional measures that will apply are still under negotiation within the Community so the dates by which the various requirements must be met have not yet been settled. In any case, it would not be possible to separate the expenditure anticipated to meet hygiene requirements from other investment in the development of fish processing businesses.

My noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for agriculture and fisheries in Scotland announced recently that some £15 million in European Community funded grant aid has been made available to the United Kingdom's fish marketing and processing industry for the period 1991-93.

The EC grants scheme provides for grants of up to 30 per cent. for fish marketing and processing projects along with a United Kingdom back-up grant of 5 per cent.

Scottish fish processors secured EC grant awards over the past 10 years of around £10 million under the previous EC scheme and there is every prospect that they will continue to be successful in attracting awards under the new scheme.

The proposed EC hygiene directive provides for a very basic set of hygiene requirements. The Scottish Fish Merchants Federation has recognised the importance to the industry of proper hygiene standards and has been pressing for early implementation of these measures, but the Government recognise that some processors have a fair way to go to meet such standards and therefore support the case for an appropriate transitional period.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what records are kept within his Department of business failures in the fish processing sector; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what employment projections have been prepared by his Department of employment in the fish processing sector in Scotland;

(3) if he will make a statement on the current condition of and prospects for the fish processing sector in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Some 9,000 people are employed in the fish processing industry in Scotland. Employment projections specific to

fish processing would not be reliable since the numbers employed are sensitive to the business decisions of a relatively small number of companies.

In the past year, there have been some closures in the processing industry, mainly linked to the reduction in the supply of species such as cod and haddock, and also to problems faced in fishmeal production, but there have also been substantial new investments as many processors diversify into other species such as mackerel, herring and farmed salmon, and also into products with greater added value. The market for mackerel and herring products has improved considerably following good publicity as to the health benefits to be had from eating oily fish and the supply outlook for these species is good. The net change in employment in fish processing in Scotland during 1990 is estimated to have been small.

Animal Carcases

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the health problems arising from the dumping of animal carcases; what action he is taking concerning the dumping of sheep in a mass open grave in Morton Wood, near Thornhill; what action he is taking to assist the knackery industry in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway to prevent the growing dumping of animal carcases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* My right hon. Friend has received representations about the possibility of health problems arising from the improper disposal of animal carcases from a number of hon. Members, local authorities, farmers, trade and professional interests and members of the public in some areas of Scotland, most notably Dumfries and Galloway Region.

It is an offence under the Dogs Act 1906 to leave cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and equine carcases unburied and thereby exposed to dogs. Where this happens it is a matter for the police and local authorities. The Control of Pollution Act 1974 also contains powers which might be invoked where carcases are left unburied. The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department has reminded local authorities, chief constables and river purification boards of their powers under the 1974 Act. In addition local branches of the National Farmers Union of Scotland in the areas concerned have been advised that their members should adhere to the law and act responsibly in disposing of carcases.

As with other industries, farmers are responsible for disposing of their waste within the existing framework of environmental and health controls. It would not, therefore, be justifiable to use taxpayers' money to subsidise the knacker industry. The Government have assisted in a number of other ways, but the best solution to both the problem of carcase dumping and the financial difficulties of the knacker trade is for the farmers to use the service and pay the charges required of them.

Discharged Hospital Patients

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the number of patients resident within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area discharged from Monklands/Cumbernauld units in each of the acute, maternity and geriatric sectors in each of the last five years;

(2) if he will give the number of patients resident within the Hamilton/East Kilbride unit area discharged from Motherwell/Clydesdale units in each of the acute, maternity and geriatric sectors in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Acute—Monklands/ Cumbernauld	2,005	2,186	2,259	2,357	2,705
Acute—Motherwell —Clydesdale	1,456	1,485	1,695	1,942	1,743
Maternity— Monklands/ Cumbernauld	1,695	1,792	1,755	1,697	1,696
Maternity— Motherwell/ Clydesdale	467	419	423	406	413
Geriatric— Monklands/ Cumbernauld	41	26	3	5	8
Geriatric— Motherwell/ Clydesdale	236	349	395	287	115

Notes:

1. The figures for the acute sector include non-obstetric and non-psychiatric discharges but do not include discharges from special care baby units, young chronic and geriatric specialties.
2. The figures for geriatric specialties include discharges and deaths from geriatric assessment and geriatric long stay units.

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the capital value of all the assets of the Aberdeen royal infirmary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* As at December 1989, the assessed capital value, on the basis of existing national health service use, of Aberdeen royal infirmary was £71·3 million. This excludes furniture and equipment.

A74

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for the A74 *(a)* the name of each section to be rebuilt as a motorway, *(b)* the state of preparation of the plans for each section, *(c)* the order in which each section will be constructed and *(d)* the estimated starting date for each section.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Millbank to Nether Abington (11·5 km)
Nether Abington to Elvanfoot (7·7 km)
Elvanfoot to Paddy's Rickle Bridge (4·3 km)
Paddy's Rickle Bridge to Harthope (6·6 km)
Harthope to Middlegill (6·3 km)
Middlegill to Beattock (4·2 km)
Beattock to Annanbank (10·5 km)
Annanbank to Dinwoodie Green (4·9 km)
Dinwoodie Green to Muirhouse (5·1 km)
Muirhouse to Water of Milk (5·9 km)
Water of Milk to Ecclefechan (4·9 km)
Ecclefechan to Eaglesfield (5·3 km)
Eaglesfield to Kirkpatrick Fleming (6 km)
Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna (7·1 km)

(b) (1) *Under construction*

Millbank to Nether Abington—scheduled to be completed in November 1991
Elvanfoot to Paddy's Rickle Bridge—scheduled to be completed in July 1992 (but programmed by the contractor to finish earlier)
Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna—scheduled to be completed in October 1992

(2) *Statutory procedures completed*

Nether Abington—Elvanfoot
Dinwoodie Green—Muirhouse
Muirhouse—Water of Milk

(3) *Draft orders published*

Paddy's Rickle Bridge—Harthope
Harthope—Middlegill
Water of Milk—Ecclefechan
Ecclefechan—Eaglesfield
Eaglesfield—Kilpatrick Fleming

(4) *Draft proposals expected to be published by the end of this year*

Middlegill—Beattock
Beattock—Annanbank
Annanbank—Dinwoodie Green

The Scottish Office Environment department has identified the Nether Abington to Elvanfoot and Muirhouse to Water of Milk, Lockerbie, sections as the next priorities for construction and the first of these has been included among the trunk road schemes scheduled to start in Scotland during the current financial year.

No decision has been made as to the order in which subsequent schemes will be built but, in deciding this, consideration will be given to such matters as minimising disruption to traffic, completing lengths between junctions and use of excess excavated material from some schemes for others with a deficit. Decisions on the schemes to be constructed in any particular financial year are taken annually each spring and will depend on the relative priority attached to the scheme and the resources available.

Scottish Fish Merchants Federation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has further considered the submission of the Scottish Fish Merchants Federation Ltd. for financial assistance based on return on capital employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The submission of the Scottish Fish Merchants Federation Ltd. for a revenue subsidy to maintain the profits of fish processors was the subject of discussions between the SFMF and Ministers last year. It was concluded that assistance of this nature would be inappropriate and contrary to EC law. The position has not changed.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent meetings he has had with representatives of the Scottish Fish Merchants Federation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) on 9 May.

HIV

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of reports of HIV antibody positive people for each of the Scottish health boards for the year ended *(a)* March 1990 and *(b)* March 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The table gives the number of positive HIV antibody test results, by health board area, which have been reported to the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit within the periods 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990 and 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991. Where the total number of positive test results in a board area is under 10, the figure, in accordance with established practice, is not published so as not to jeopardise medical confidentiality.

Health Board	*1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990*	*1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991*
Argyll and Clyde	[1]—	[1]—
Ayrshire and Arran	[1]—	Nil
Borders	Nil	[1]—
Dumfries and Galloway	Nil	[1]—
Fife	[1]—	[1]—
Forth Valley	[1]—	[1]—
Grampian	[1]—	11
Greater Glasgow	25	36
Highland	[1]—	[1]—
Lanarkshire	[1]—	[1]—
Lothian	91	71
Orkney	Nil	Nil
Shetland	Nil	Nil
Tayside	15	20
Western Isles	Nil	Nil
Totals	147	150

[1] Less than 10.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the cumulative totals for HIV antibody positive reports for each of the Scottish health boards for *(a)* March 1990 and *(b)* March 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The table gives the cumulative totals of positive HIV antibody test results, by health board area, which had been reported to the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit up to 31 March 1990 and 31 March 1991. Where the total number of positive test results in a board area is under 10, the figure, in accordance with established practice, is not published so as not to jeopardise medical confidentiality.

Health Board	*At 31 March 1990*	*At 31 March 1991*
Argyll and Clyde	14	15
Ayrshire and Arran	[1]—	[1]—
Borders	[1]—	[1]—
Dumfries and Galloway	13	15
Fife	26	28
Forth Valley	60	61
Grampian	40	51
Greater Glasgow	278	314
Highland	12	14
Lanarkshire	27	29
Lothian	1,053	1,124
Orkney	Nil	Nil
Shetland	[1]—	[1]—
Tayside	233	253
Western Isles	Nil	Nil
Totals	1,769	1,919

[1] Less than 10.

Rents-to-mortgage Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications have been approved under the rents-to-mortgage scheme for *(a)* Scottish Home tenants, *(b)* tenants of new town development corporations and *(c)* local authority tenants in Scotland; and how many have been rejected for each category.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* Information on sales and applications in process, based on returns to 30 April 1991, is shown in the table. The eligibility of a tenant to purchase under the rent to mortgage scheme is checked before a formal application to purchase is made. It is therefore not necessary to reject applications.

	Sales	*Applications in process*
Scottish Homes	144	95
New Town Development Corporations	6	41
Local Authorities	—	118

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 May 1991

TRANSPORT

MV Derbyshire

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the full report produced by the marine accident investigation branch entitled, "Derbyshire: Review of New Material."

Mr. McLoughlin: The formal report submitted by the chief inspector of marine accidents and placed in the Library on 25 March set out all the reasons for the recommendation that the formal investigation should not be reopened.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning activities of private wheel clamping firms in operations directed against vehicles allegedly parked on private land.

Mr. Chope: I have received several letters from hon. Members who have received complaints from constituents.

Nuclear Fuel Transport

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions each year since 1979 nuclear reaction fuel has been transported to Sellafield via Leeds; and what safeguard provisions covered the fuel in transit.

Mr. McLoughlin: The timing and routeing of such consignments are matters for British Rail. However, I am informed that irradiated nuclear fuel would not normally travel through Leeds.

B5356, Stretton

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has agreed to special motorway signs on the M56 in order to direct heavy goods vehicles away from the B5356 in Stretton, near Warrington.

Mr. Chope: Yes. We are now considering approval of the signs which the local councils wish to erect on local roads.

Freight

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what planning his Department is undertaking to achieve the objective of moving freight from roads to railways; whether he envisages any specific targets over the next decade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: We are reviewing ways in which industry could be further encouraged to make more use of the rail systems, given in particular the advent of the channel tunnel and developments in combined transport. I do not have specific targets.

Bus Lanes, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total mileage of bus lanes in the Greater London area.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from London Transport that there are 47 miles of bus lane in the Greater London area.

ENERGY

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[pursuant to his reply, 14 May 1991, c. 87-88]:* Experience with the first four months operation of the home energy efficiency scheme has confirmed that it meets a real need and is being well received. However, it has also shown that work must be closely monitored and controlled to maintain the high standards for which the scheme aims. I have today announced changes to the scheme designed further to protect those clients who make direct applications under the scheme.

I have placed in the Library copies of a press release which gives details of these changes, which are designed to maintain the principle of customer choice whilst ensuring high standards.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing, for 1990-91 and 1991-92 separately for local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland (i) capital grants from central Government, (ii) other receipts, showing separately items of £0·5 billion or more, (iii) total receipts, (iv) current expenditure on goods and services, showing housing separately, (v) current grants and subsidies, showing housing separately, (vi) interest repayments, (vii) capital expenditure and net lending and (viii) total expenditure showing that on the basis of national accounts and public expenditure measurement.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested on capital grants from central government to local authorities on a public expenditure basis is given in table 5.5 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement" —Cm 1520. Data on capital grants on a national accounts basis cannot readily be split between terrritories. Data on local authority income from the community charge and non-domestic rates by territory are given in reply to a question from the hon. Member today. Detailed data on other local authority receipts in 1990-91 and 1991-92 are not yet available.

The analysis of local authority expenditure requested is given, for 1990-91, in the table. The data are consistent with the economic category analysis of local authority expenditure given in table 5.7 of Cm 1520. Data on local authority debt interest cannot readily be split between

territories. Information on the public expenditure basis for 1991-92 and for both 1990-91 and 1991-92 on a national accounts basis is not yet available.

Local authority expenditure[1] in Great Britain by territory and economic category, 1990-91

£ million

	England	Scotland	Wales
Current expenditure on goods and services[2]	33,255	4,335	2,057
of which: housing	309	4	13
Current grants and subsidies	5,981	686	340
of which: housing[3]	—	2	—
Net capital expenditure[4]	3,989	816	471
TOTAL	43,224	5,837	2,868

[1] Excluding debt interest.
[2] Including pay.
[3] Excluding housing benefit.
[4] Including net lending.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables which reconcile to table 6.7 in the 1991 Financial Statement and Budget Report and which show separately for England, Wales, Scotland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom and for each of the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 the following information on local authority transactions *(a)* gross income from community charge and domestic rates before deduction of (i) rate rebates, (ii) community charge benefit, (iii) transitional relief, (iv) community charge reduction scheme and (v) community charge grant, showing each item separately, *(b)* net income from community charge and domestic rates and *(c)* income from non-domestic rates.

Mr. Mellor: The following tables show the information requested:

1989-90 Outturn

£ billion

	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
Gross community charge/domestic rate income	9·7	0·4	1·0	11·1	—
Community charge benefit/domestic rate rebates	1·3	0·1	0·2	1·5	—
Net community charge/domestic rate income	8·4	0·3	0·8	9·6	0·1
Gross non-domestic rate payments	9·8	0·4	1·2	11·4	
Non-domestic rate rebates	0·3	—	—	0·3	
Net non-domestic rate rebates	9·5	0·4	1·2	11·1	

1990-91 Estimated outturn

£ billion

	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
Gross community charge income	12·3	0·5	1·1	13·9	—
Community charge benefit	1·9	0·1	0·2	2·2	—
Transitional relief	0·3	[1]—	[1]—	0·4	—
Net community charge income/domestic rate income	10·2	0·4	0·9	11·4	0·1
Non-domestic rate payments	10·7	0·4	1·3	12·5	

[1] Less than £50 million.

1991-92 Forecast

£ billion

	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
Gross community charge income	8·5	0·2	0·9	9·8	—
Community charge reduction scheme/transitional relief	1·1	0·1	0·1	1·4	—
Community charge benefit	1·1	[1]—	0·1	1·2	—
Net community charge income/domestic rate income	6·4	0·2	0·7	7·2	0·1
Non-domestic rate payments	12·1	0·5	1·4	14·1	
Note: community charge grant	4·8	0·3	0·5	5·6	—

[1] Less than £50 million.

VAT

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, comparable to table 3 of appendix 7 to HC 289 of Session 1990-91 but expressed to the nearest £1 per year, of VAT payments by income decile group, showing separately the results for *(a)* all households in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom and *(b)* retired households but continuing to attribute such retired households to income decile groups calculated on the basis of all households.

Mr. Mellor: The figures in the table referred to were derived from Central Statistical Office analysis of the family expenditure survey. Because the statistical adjustments made to the data for this analysis have been designed at the United Kingdom level, separate figures for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not available. Moreover the sample sizes for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be too small to provide reliable results. Figures for the United Kingdom and retired households on the basis requested are set out in the table.

Estimated increase in VAT payments in 1991-92 as a result of the rise in the VAT rate to 17·5 per cent.: average by decile group of households ranked by disposable income: £ per year.

	All United Kingdom households:	*Of which retired:*
Bottom	40	32
2	52	42
3	78	69
4	114	123
5	140	142
6	164	143
7	200	195
8	232	
9	279	253
Top	369	
Average	167	79

Notes:
1. Based on the 1987 Family Expenditure Survey uprated to 1991. Figures do not take account of any changes in the pattern of household expenditure which might follow on from a change in the VAT rate.
2. In order to provide an estimate for a reasonably large sample, the figures for the retired households in the top three decile groups have been combined.

Next Steps

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. David Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the Minister for the Civil Service's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 30 April 1991, at columns *111-13*. Within Her Majesty's Treasury the Chessington computer centre, which provides computerised payroll and other services to Government departments and other customers, is due to become an agency on 1 April 1993. Of the other Chancellor's Departments the Central Office of Information, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Royal Mint have been established as agencies. The Valuation Offices of the Inland Revenue will be established as a single agency from 30 September 1991. The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are implementing announced programmes of action which will enable them to operate fully on next steps lines.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, consistent with table 2.1 of Cm 1520, showing for the years 1963-64 to 1990-91 and expressed to the nearest £ million, *(a)* local authority expenditure on a national accounts definition, *(b)* local authority expenditure on goods and services on a national accounts definition, *(c)* general Government expenditure excluding privatisation proceeds, *(d)* general Government expenditure on goods and services and *(e)* gross domestic product at market prices.

Mr. Mellor: Information up to the fourth quarter of 1990 is included on the CSO database in the following series—identified by their database code—and published in the "Statistical Supplement to Autumn Statement"—Cm 1520.

(a)—ABAD:	Local authority expenditure on a national accounts definition.
(b)—GTEF:	Local authority expenditure on goods and services on a national accounts definition.
(c)—Table 2.1 of Cm 1520:	General government expenditure excluding privatisation proceeds.
(d)—GTEG:	General government expenditure on goods and services.
(e)—CAOB:	Gross domestic product (average estimates) at market prices.

The CSO database is accessible in the Library of the House.

WALES

Recycling

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the local authorities and their associations in Wales regarding the need for supplementary credit approvals specifically earmarked for the encouragement of recycling initiatives in Wales;

(2) what provision he intends to make concerning supplementary credit approvals for local authorities and voluntary bodies in Wales for initiatives to encourage recycling.

Mr. David Hunt: Capital resources in Wales are distributed by means of unhypothecated formulae which have the support of the local authority associations. This method of distribution of resources was introduced so that local authorities can determine individually how the resources made available are spent.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from local authorities and voluntary bodies in Wales regarding the absence of any funds earmarked for the encouragement of recycling initiatives.

Mr. David Hunt: Two letters have been received as well as a number of telephone inquiries.

South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council concerning the provision of *(a)* new offices and *(b)* training facilities for the TEC, both in the immediate needs and for the medium term.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

First Aid

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will introduce an education support grant specifically for the training of first-aiders in educational establishments;

(2) if any specific financial support is made available by his Department to ensure that the guidance in the Welsh Office circular entitled "Arrangements for First Aid in Schools and Colleges", and advice in other publications is implemented in schools and colleges.

Sir Wyn Roberts: First aid provision in educational establishments forms part of the normal responsibilities of local education authorities. Their expenditure on such provision is supported by revenue support grant and I have no plans for further support by way of education support grant. The 1991-92 local authority revenue support settlement allows for a 7·9 per cent. increase in education spending at an all-Wales level.

Next Steps

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: There is currently one executive agency within my Department, Cadw Welsh Historic Monuments executive agency. Work is proceeding in concert with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to establish the agricultural Development Advisory Service as a joint England and Wales Agency in April 1992. I am actively reviewing other functions discharged by my Department with a view to applying next steps principles to them.

Welsh Language Bill

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he received from the Welsh Language Board a copy of its final draft for a new Welsh Language Act; and on how many occasions since then he or an official of his Department, has met representatives of the Welsh Language Board to discuss that draft Bill.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend received a final draft copy of the Welsh Language Board's report on its legislative proposals on 9 January of this year. Welsh Office officials have subsequently been considering the board's proposals. We will be meeting the chairman of the board to discuss this matter on 23 May.

Sheep and Beef Producers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total payment made last year to sheep and beef producers in Wales under the EC scheme for less-favoured area support; and how much more would have been paid if the United Kingdom Government had allowed such payments to be made to the full EC maximum permitted level last year, and not limited by the United Kingdom restriction level.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of £33·3 million was paid out to 15,103 hill livestock compensatory allowance claimants in 1990. The United Kingdom financial limits led to payments to 529 claimants being reduced by a total of £220,949—0·66 per cent. of the total expenditure. The amount that would have been payable if the United Kingdom had adopted the EC maximum limits could be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by year for the last 10 years, and for the current year to date, the number of *(a)* public footpaths and *(b)* public bridleways that have been (i) created and (ii) closed to the general public.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not held centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state on what date he received a letter posted by Gwynedd county council on 12 March, concerning the community charge transitional relief and alleged inconsistencies in this scheme within the county of Gwynedd; on what date a reply was sent; and if he will make a statement on the issues raised by this letter.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The letter from Gwynedd county council dated 12 March 1991 was not received. A copy of the letter was received from the county council on 14 May 1991. A reply has been sent.

Towyn Floods

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to make further grant payments under the Bellwin scheme to local authorities in north Wales which were involved in carrying out emergency works following the flood emergency at Towyn.

Mr. David Hunt: As my hon. Friend will know, I have already made payments under the Bellwin scheme, amounting to over £2 million, to local authorities in Wales which were directly affected by the severe weather during the Winter of 1989-90. In the case of the north Wales flooding, one of the ways in which I recognised the exceptional nature of the problems was by extending the deadline for receipt of authorities' final audited claim forms to 30 June 1991.

Parliamentary approval to payment of grant in respect of these claims is being sought in a summer supplementary estimate on the "rate rebates, community charge reduction grants and flood and storm emergency services, Wales" vote—class XVI, vote 11. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure on meeting mature claims will be met by a repayable advance of £500,000 from the Contingencies Fund.

Opencast Mining

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the planning appeals relating to opencast coalmining sites in Wales currently under consideration by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Llanilid West, Mid Glamorgan
Brynhenllys, Powys
Bannel Bridge, Clwyd
Park Slip West, Mid Glamorgan
Graweth Farm, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan

In addition, the planning application for an opencast coal mine at Pwll Du has been called in for determination by the Secretary of State. The cases are at various stages in their determination.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Lilley: The nine excutive agencies within the DTI are Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, the National Engineering Laboratory, the National Physical Laboratory, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Patent Office, Radiocommunications Agency and Warren Spring Laboratory.

I continue to consider the possibility of establishing further agencies in the DTI but I have not at the moment identified any candidates.

For ECGD, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 19 July 1990, *Official Report* column *677*.

Company Liquidations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he takes where the liquidator of a company fails to file the statutory returns as required by section 595 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: This is an operational matter for Companies House executive agency. I have asked the chief executive to write direct.

Traders (Monitoring)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will provide a list of the number of traders monitored by each of the authorised bodies under the provisions of the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Redwood: I understand from the Securities and Investments Board that the position on 8 May 1991, including interim authorisations, was as shown in the following table. Some authorised persons are members of more than one self-regulating organisation.

	Numbers
Analysis of Authorised Persons	
Regulated directly by the Securities and Investments Board	76
Members of Self Regulating Organisations	
The Association of Futures Brokers and Dealers	10
The Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association	7,126
The Investment Management Regulatory Organisation	1,249
The Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation	663
The Securities and Futures Authority	1,391
Certified by Recognised Professional Bodies	
The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales	6,047
The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland	536
The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland	183
The Chartered Association of Certified Accountants	1,050
The Law Society of England and Wales	6,967
The Law Society of Scotland	932
The Law Society of Northern Ireland	421
Insurance Brokers Registration Council	1,595
Institute of Actuaries	31

Prudential Corporation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish an inquiry into the manner in which Price Waterhouse acquired the audit of the Prudential Corporation.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Companies Acts (Investigations)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the investigations carried out under various sections of the Companies Acts for the year to 31 March.

Mr. Redwood: During the year to 31 March 1991, a total of 178 such inquiries were commenced; one under section 431 of the Companies Act 1985, four under section 432, two under section 446 and 171 under section 447. The inquiries under sections 431 and 432 have been announced and are as follows:

Date of appointment	*Name of company*	*Type of inquiry*
15 June 1990	Atlantic Computer Systems plc	Section 432
15 June 1990	Atlantic Computers plc	Section 432
16 August 1990	Astra Holdings plc	Section 431
31 October 1990	London United Investments plc	Section 432
7 January 1991	Norton Group plc	Section 432

Companies (Suspended Shares)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any company whose shares are suspended has been investigated by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: Investigations under section 432 of the Companies Act 1985 into the affairs of James Ferguson Holdings plc, BOM Holdings plc and Norton Group plc are in progress and have been announced. The stock exchange has advised that the shares of these companies are suspended. Section 447 investigations are kept confidential.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid by the Insolvency Service to accountancy firms in each year since 1988.

Mr. Redwood: The Insolvency Service made the following payments in respect of additional work done by insolvency practitioners on disqualification applications made by the Secretary of State. Generally these payments are made to the accountancy firms in which the insolvency practitioners are partners or employees.

1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
£7,814	£25,429	£29,021

A payment of £23,500 was also made during the financial year 1990-91 in respect of consultancy work on computerised estate accounting.

Bryanston

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received seeking the publication of the final report on Bryanston.

Mr. Redwood: The papers are being recovered from store. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ernst and Young

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any staff or partner from Ernst and Young is currently seconded to his Department.

Mr. Redwood: Two Ernst and Young staff are currently on secondment to the Department.

Fireworks

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his responsibilities under the Fireworks Act 1951 and on his discharging of them.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Our responsibilities under this Act relate to sections 4 and 7 which deal with Health and Safety at work considerations under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Additionally, explosives inspectors appointed by the Health and Safety Executive during their visits to factories, magazines or stores have a power under section 1(1) of the Fireworks Act 1951 to take away for testing a sample of fireworks which they consider may present dangers when in the possession of the public. This power is enforced where appropriate and necessary.

The remainder of the provision in the Fireworks Act 1951 are properly the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to require licensing of all fireworks to be used only for properly organised firework displays, put on by trained people, and set up a national training scheme.

Mr. Redwood: The firework industry already has a training scheme for organisers of displays. Like the hon. Member, I want to see fireworks used properly so that there is pleasure rather than tragedy on bonfire night. Requiring licences would cut down the number of good organised displays open to people on bonfire night, but would not of itself guarantee safety.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent incidents have occurred involving category 4 fireworks; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the control of such fireworks.

Mr. Redwood: I do not have a breakdown of accidents for different categories of fireworks. However, category 4 —large display—fireworks should not be available in the shops. Most are imported and their import licence prohibits suppliers from selling them through the shops, while for their part United Kingdom manufacturers refrain from doing so.

Defence Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy to place before Parliament annually a list of defence exports including details of equipment supplied, contract values and recipients.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The hon. Member will be aware that following the Prime Minister's initiative for a United Nations register of arms transfers, urgent consideration is being given to such an international register.

New Cars

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the pricing of new cars in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is currently investigating the United Kingdom car market, including car prices in the United Kingdom. When the commission's report is available, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will need to consider whether there is scope for any action in the light of it.

Accountancy Practice

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy towards accountancy practice, standards and forms, in relation to corporate bodies.

Mr. Redwood: The Government's policy on company accounting was debated at length during the passage of the

Companies Act 1989, which introduced a number of important changes. As regards accounting standards, the Government welcomed and support the new Financial Reporting Council and its subsidiaries, including the Accounting Standards Board.

Shipbuilding

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current operation and level of usage of the home shipbuilders credit guarantee scheme.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme has been in operation since 1967. The scheme offer United Kingdom-based shipowners, placing orders with United Kingdom shipyards for the construction, completion or radical alteration of merchant vessels, financing terms comparable with officially supported export credit terms available for orders placed with overseas yards. Vessels which may qualify for support under the scheme conform with the definition in the OECD understanding of export credits for ships. The scheme provides two elements of support:

(i) a Government guarantee of up to 80 per cent. of the loan arranged by the purchaser of the vessel and repayable by equal half yearly instalments over a maximum of eight and a half years;

(ii) a fixed rate of interest for the duration of the loan with the Government paying the difference between the fixed and commercial loan interest rates. The Government support conforms to the OECD Understanding.

In the year to 31 March 1991, payments of interest support grants totalled £52 million. As at 31 March 1991, the amount of loan principal guaranteed under the scheme totalled £924·6 million in respect of 305 vessels. In the year ended 31 March 1991, a total of 40 new guarantees were given.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ukranian Doctors

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there are any plans to fund training for Ukranian doctors on cancer-related illnesses.

Mrs. Chalker: We have contributed, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to the international efforts to tackle the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, including by promoting specialist contacts with Ukranian doctors and scientists. We shall consider the possibility of further assistance in the light of the International Atomic Energy Agency report, due out on 21 May.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Employment Laws

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many prosecutions there were in the last 12-month period for which figures are available for contraventions of the child employment law.

Mr. John Patten: In England and Wales in 1989, there were 35 prosecutions for offences against employment of children Acts. Data for 1990 are not yet available. This information is published annually in volume 1 of the "Criminal statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary tables" copies of which are in the Library.

West Midlands Police

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed and detected in the Walsall H division of the West Midlands police authority for each year since 1978.

Mr. John Patten: The information is published in the annual reports of the chief constable of West Midlands police. Copies of these publications from 1980 are available in the Library.

Parole

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of life sentence prisoners who were released each year since 1981; and what was the number in each year whose release was proposed by the Parole Board and turned down by him or his predecessors.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of persons released from prison service establishments on life licence in each of the years 1979-89 were published in table 8.5 of "Prison statistics England and Wales 1989"—Cm. 1221—a copy of which is in the Library. The figures exclude those re-released following a period in prison after recall from a previous licence. In 1990, the latest year for which information is available, 81 people were released on life licence.

Information on the numbers of life sentence prisoners recommended as suitable for release by the Parole Board and the numbers of those recommendations not accepted by Home Secretaries is published in successive annual reports of the Parole Board. For convenience the figures for 1980-90, which include re-releases following a period in prison after recall from a previous licence, are set out in the table. Parole Board recommendations of "suitable for release" have been for dates ranging from the immediate future up to two and a half years ahead.

Life sentence prisoners recommended for release by the Parole Board 1989-90

Year of recommendation	*Recommended*	*Not accepted by Home Secretary*
1980	102	6
1981	147	4
1982	144	5
1983	121	16
1984	112	10
1985	94	16
1986	120	14
1987	147	23
1988	91	13
1989	119	15
1990	138	[1]35

[1] A further 30 cases were still under consideration by the Home Secretary at the end of 1990.

British National Party

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what request he has received from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to ban the British National party march planned to take place in Thamesmead on Saturday 25 May.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what request he has received from the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to ban the proposed marches by the British National party on the Thamesmead estate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No request has been made by the Commissioner for the Home Secretary's consent to an order under section 13 of the Public Order Act 1986 prohibiting the march by the British National party in Thamesmead on 25 May. The Commissioner is considering whether to exercise his power under section 12 of the Act to impose conditions on the route of the procession.

Empty Housing

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of Home Office domestic properties there are throughout the United Kingdom and *(b)* the number unoccupied at the present moment, indicating how many have been unoccupied for six months, how many have been unoccupied for one year, how many have been unoccupied for two years and how many have been unoccupied for longer than two years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The best estimate of the total number of domestic properties owned by the Home Office prison service in England and Wales is at present 2,825, of which 355 are unoccupied for the following reasons:

	Numbers
Vacant for security reasons or redevelopment	94
Vacant for reallocation to designated staff	56
Awaiting demolition	63
On market for sale	112
Awaiting disposal	30
	355

In addition the Home Office directorate of telecommunications has 20 properties, of which nine are vacant and for sale; the Fire Service college at Moreton-in-Marsh has 36 properties, all occupied; and the Emergency Planning college at Easingwold has 11 properties, all occupied.

Information on the length of time properties have been vacant is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners there are in Britain and in each prison as of 10 May; and what is the capacity of each prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 10 May there were a total of 45,302 prisoners in England and Wales, including 603 in police cells. The table shows the number of prisoners in each prison service establishment and the certified normal accommodation—the uncrowded capacity—of each establishment.

Prison service establishments: certified normal accommodation (CNA) and population on 10 May 1991

Establishment	*CNA*	*Population*
Local prisons and remand centres		
Bedford	171	264
Belmarsh	360	283
Birmingham	575	972
Bristol	379	381
Brixton	739	1,072
Camp Hill	461	456
Canterbury	230	324
Cardiff	338	474
Chelmsford	244	402
Dorchester	152	185
Durham (male)	601	843
Exeter	243	393
Gloucester	200	356
Haslar	105	103
Latchmere House	127	28
Leeds	627	965
Leicester	205	343
Lewes	230	416
Lincoln	391	584
Liverpool	931	1,165
Manchester	185	175
Norwich	495	486
Oxford	121	165
Pentonville	754	810
Preston	408	479
Reading	184	257
Rochester	306	277
Shrewsbury	176	286
Swansea	229	287
Wandsworth	1,275	1,351
Winchester	530	521
Wormwood Scrubs	743	837
Brockhill	161	244
Everthorpe	304	271
Feltham	874	765
Glen Parva	854	755
Hindley	323	400
Low Newton (male)	131	199
Portland	527	446
Stoke Heath	360	240
Closed male training prisons		
Albany	389	362
Blundeston	410	392
Coldingley	299	288
Dartmoor	619	546
Frankland	432	433
Full Sutton	634	417
Garth	512	508
Gartree	320	285
Grendon	225	197
Kingston	150	141
Long Lartin	432	425
Maidstone	549	518
Nottingham	218	221
Parkhurst	239	215
Swaleside	504	500
Wakefield	753	669
Acklington	676	508
Aldington	127	112
Ashwell	404	396
Blantyre House	87	87
Channings Wood	594	577
Downview	286	280
Erlestoke	218	210
Featherstone	599	580
Haverigg	351	342
Highpoint	824	768
Lancaster	186	242
Lindholme	800	771
Littlehey	593	517
Northeye	249	222
Randby	363	320
Risley	326	311
Send	101	98
Shepton Mallet	175	241
Stafford	606	723
Stocken	393	392
The Mount	484	222
The Verne	600	585
Thorp Arch	150	148
Usk	240	191
Wayland	580	576
Wellingborough	344	188
Whatton	161	159
Wymott	816	747
Open male training prisons		
Ford	568	525
Foston Hall	98	88
Kirkham	632	583
Leyhill	410	412
Morton Hall	168	162
North Sea Camp	202	177
Rudgate	300	281
Spring Hill	210	206

Establishment	CNA	Population
Standford Hill	384	374
Sudbury	425	423
Male young offender institutions		
Aylesbury	296	238
Castington	300	253
Deerbolt	404	395
Dover	347	221
Eastwood Park	134	99
Finnamore Wood	116	84
Guys Marsh	180	113
Hollesley Bay	569	309
Hatfield	180	162
Hewell Grange	136	112
Huntercombe	166	161
Kirklevington	106	86
Northallerton	146	188
Onley	520	454
Swinfen Hall	182	182
Thorn Cross	300	207
Werrington	110	106
Wetherby	196	174
Female establishments		
Askham Grange	134	95
Bullwood Hall	119	102
Cookham Wood	120	120
Drake Hall	262	189
Durham	39	27
East Sutton Park	84	75
Holloway	517	489
Low Newton	36	27
New Hall	122	103
Pucklechurch	56	51
Risley	91	80
Styal	258	186
Total	44,295	44,699
Police cells:	—	603
Total population	—	45,302

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to change the present ratio of prison officers to inmates in centres for young offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: Between 1 April 1987 and 1 April this year, the ratio of prison officers to inmates in young offender establishments rose from 0·37 to 0·46 officers per inmate. Depending on changes in the prison population during the year, a further improvement in this ratio is likely to occur by April 1992 as a result of the recruitment of staff for new young offender establishments during 1991-92.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to improve the ratio of prison officers to inmates in the prison service.

Mrs. Rumbold: Between 1 April 1987 and 1 April this year, the ratio of prison officers to inmates increased from 0·35 to 0·48 officers per inmate. Depending on changes in the prison population during the year, there is likely to be a further small improvement in the ratio of officers to inmates by April 1992 as a result of the recruitment of around 1,500 officers to staff new prisons.

Lorry Drivers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by year for the last 10 years and for the current year to date *(a)* how many lorry drivers have been convicted of a motoring offence on the evidence alone of a tachograph fitted in the driving cab, *(b)* what was the offence committed and *(c)* what penalty was imposed on (i) the driver and (ii) the operator.

Mr. John Patten: The only offence for which the evidence of a tachograph alone is used is "Failing to observe limits on hours of driving and duty, or rest requirements" under sections 96(11) and 96(11A) of the Transport Act 1968. This applies only to drivers or operators of heavy goods vehicles.

The table gives the information available for this offence. The latest statistics are for 1989; the table also includes data for the previous nine years. No breakdown is available centrally between drivers and operators.

Findings of guilt for failing to observe limits on hours of driving and duty, or rest requirements at magistrates' courts England and Wales 1980 to 1989

Number of offences

Year	Total findings of guilt	Sentence or order: Absolute or conditional discharge or recognizance	Sentence or order: Probation or supervision order	Sentence or order: Fine	Sentence or order: Other[1]
1980	2,471	221	—	2,250	—
1981	2,143	218	—	1,925	—
1982	3,104	97	—	3,006	1
1983	5,030	240	—	4,781	9
1984	5,990	354	—	5,617	19
1985	6,778	572	1	6,184	21
1986	6,314	446	—	5,828	40
1987	3,910	368	—	3,527	15
1988	5,199	320	2	4,844	33
1989	8,304	505	—	7,586	213

[1] Includes a few cases committed to the Crown Court for sentence.

Source: Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary tables, Issues 1980 to 1989.

Poland (Visas)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to end the requirement of visas for visitors from Poland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to his recent question on this subject on 8 May at column *477*.

Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi or his wife, Kuldip, have been retained as interpreters by (i) the immigration and nationality department or (ii) the Metropolitan police since 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Records of this kind are not held centrally and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I understand that Mr. Bedi and his wife have worked as casual interpreters on occasions for the immigration service and the police since 1968.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many official invitations have been issued to Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi to attend official functions organised by his Department since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Records of invitations issued to individuals are not held centrally and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost, if at all.

War Crimes

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when investigations into alleged war crimes will begin.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The War Crimes Act received Royal Assent on 9 May and the war crimes investigation unit established by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis will begin their investigations immediately. Parliamentary approval of this new expenditure is being sought in the supply estimates for the Home Office Vote for "administration, etc." for 1991-92—class IX, vote 3. Pending this approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £300,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Trespass

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has completed his evaluation of section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We have now completed the thorough review of section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 which was announced by my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary on 26 October 1989. I am grateful to all those individuals and organisations who contributed their views, including members of this House.

After considering carefully all the representations received, I have concluded that more needs to be done to secure a better understanding by all interested parties of the way in which the law should operate, but that no change to the law is necessary.

I have therefore decided, after consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, to issue guidance to the police on the application of section 39. Whilst the decision whether or not to use the powers available under section 39 is an operational matter entirely within the discretion of the senior police officer present at the scene of a trespass, the guidance aims to assist forces in coming to a more consistent application of these powers across the country in dealing with aggravated trespass. A copy of this guidance has been placed in the Library.

I believe that it would be helpful to the interested parties to have available a simple guide to the law in relation to trespass on land. My Department is therefore publishing today, in consultation with the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Department of the Environment, a leaflet setting out the main provisions of the law. It covers, as well as section 39, the civil remedies open to landowners and the requirements in respect of the provision of official sites for travellers under the Caravan Sites Act 1968. A copy of the leaflet has also been placed in the Library.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will continue to encourage local authorities to fulfil their duty under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 to provide adequate numbers of sites for gipsies.

I believe that these measures should do much to reduce uncertainty about the proper application of section 39 and will assist landowners in finding the most suitable remedy for trespass on land in the circumstances of each particular case.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq (Economic Sanctions)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received concerning the United Nations Security Council appeal issued on 29 April for assistance to the 21 countries with special economic problems arising from their compliance with sanctions imposed against Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None. Our policy on assistance for these countries was set out in the answer given to the hon. Member by the Minister for Overseas Development on 14 May at column *99*.

Medical and Dental Officers (Pay)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the pay of medical and dental officers in the armed forces.

The Prime Minister: The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has submitted to me a supplementary report on the pay of medical and dental officers in the armed forces which recommends increases of between 7·5 and 11·4 per cent., with an average increase of 11·2 per cent. The Government have decided to accept the recommendations in full, though, in common with the pay awards announced on 31 January for the national health service doctors and dentists, with whom the pay of service medical and dental officers is closely linked, implementation will be staged, with 7·5 per cent. payable from 1 April 1991 and the balance of the award payable from 1 December 1991.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Services Committees

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will announce the composition of the four new social services committees which will replace the district committees disbanded on 1 April.

Mr. Hanley: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) on 20 May, *Official Report*, column *379*.

Prescriptions

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, over the last five years for which figures are available, the loss to the health service by improper prescription claims; and if he will make a statement in response to the complaints of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: It is not possible to state accurately the loss to the health service by improper claims for exemption from prescription charges. Estimates based on sample surveys which began in 1986-87 are:

	£
1986-87	1,345,564
1987-88	2,220,000
1988-89	2,123,446
1989-90	2,323,736

Improper prescription claims have been the subject of consideration by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Central Services Agency in the light of previous Comptroller and Auditor-General Reports. Arising out of this consideration the medical and pharmaceutical professions will shortly be consulted about a range of measures designed to counteract this problem without imposing undue restrictions on patients requiring medication. The specific criticisms made by the Comptroller and Auditor-General about weaknesses within the pharmaceutical branch of the agency are not directly linked with the improper claiming. The Department will consider with the agency the action which should now be taken on this aspect of the Comptroller and Auditor-General's 1988-89 report.

Police Complaints Commission

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for copies of the 1990 annual report of the independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland to be laid in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The report has been laid today. It is the third annual report from the commission which was established in 1988 by the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Detailed recommendations about the workings of articles 4 to 16 of the 1987 order, which provide for the handling of complaints from the public about individual police officers, were made by the commission in its comprehensive triennial review which was presented in a report to the House on 27 March 1991. In view of this the annual report is mainly a factual account of the commission's work during the year and an exposition of its role and functions. Nevertheless, it provides a valuable contribution to the important process of increasing public awareness of the police complaints system in Northern Ireland. I commend it to those interested in these matters and I am certain that this account of the commission's work will prove to be another important step in increasing the public's confidence in the police complaints system and in the commission's role.

Goodman Meat

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the gifts given to staff within the Department of Agriculture from interests associated with the Goodman Meat firm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* Under the Northern Ireland civil service pay and conditions of service code only gifts of

"a trivial or inexpensive seasonal nature"

may be accepted by civil servants. To my knowledge only gifts in this category have been accepted by staff in the Department of Agriculture.

At Christmas 1989 and 1990 some staff in HQ divisions of the Department of Agriculture received unsolicited gifts of alcohol from the Goodman Group. The group was contacted and told that staff could not accept such gifts but the group refused to accept their return. Accordingly, 10 bottles of spirits—nine in 1989 and one in 1990—were donated to the NSPCC which acknowledged their receipt to the Goodman Group.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of individuals who have qualified for legal aid; and what percentage of the population this represents.

The Attorney-General: Calculations are not made as a matter of course of the number of individuals falling within the eligibility limits for legal aid. It is estimated that in 1990 approximately 36 million people or 66 per cent. of the population were eligible on income grounds for non-matrimonial civil legal aid. For personal injury claims it is estimated that 38 million people or 69 per cent. of the population were eligible. No estimates are available of the percentage of the population eligible for matrimonial or criminal legal aid. The numbers of individuals obtaining legal aid are detailed in tables published in legal aid annual reports to 1988-89 the Legal Aid Board annual report for 1989-90 and "Judicial Statistics".

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of households eligible for legal aid in court proceedings and the percentage of those entitled who had to make a contribution to the costs.

The Attorney-General: Calculations are not made as a matter of course of the number of households falling within the eligibility limits for legal aid. In 1990 it is estimated that 18·5 million households were eligible on income grounds for civil non-matrimonial legal aid—19·5 million in personal injury cases. About 60 per cent. are estimated to have been eligible with a contribution.

Free Legal Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement in respect of access to free legal services.

The Attorney-General: Those legal services, that are paid for under the legal aid schemes are available free of

charge to all those who satisfy the relevant merits test and whose means are such that they are not required to make a financial contribution towards their legal costs. Free legal advice and assistance is also available irrespective of means through the duty solicitor schemes at magistrates' courts and police stations.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of people entitled to free legal advice.

The Attorney-General: Calculations are not made as a matter of course of the numbers of individuals falling within the eligibility limits for free legal advice and assistance. In 1989-90, nil contributions were assessed in 917,882 of the 1,029,018 bills paid for legal advice and assistance. Figures for earlier years are contained in the legal aid annual reports.

Mr. Mohinder Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi or his wife, Kuldip, were retained as interpreters by the immigration appellate authorities since 1984; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The immigration appellate authorities—IAA— have no record since 1984 of Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi or his wife Kuldip being included on the panel of casual interpreters used by the IAA.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions since 1984 Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi has appeared as a representative before the immigration appellate authorities to represent *(a)* appellants and *(b)* respondents; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not readily available because the immigration appellate authorities—IAA—do not record statistics of the number of occasions unqualified representatives are granted leave to appear before them. The granting of leave to appear before them is a matter for the IAA judiciary.

Ashworth Covenant

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Attorney-General what has been the cost to public funds of the relator action on the Ashworth covenant at Birtenshaw Farm, Sylvia Scotland v Barratt Manchester and what further relator actions he anticipates being brought.

The Attorney-General: Any assessment of the cost to public funds occasioned by Attorney-General ex rel. Sylvia Scotland *v* Barratt Manchester Limited and Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council must await the conclusion of those proceedings. No other applications have been received for consent to commence a relator action in respect of the Ashworth covenant.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Adult Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial contribution he has made to *(a)* the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, *(b)* the unit for the development of adult and continuing education, *(c)* the national educational guidance initiative and *(d)* REPLAN since 1979, at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is given in the table.

1990-91 prices

	(a) NIACE £	*(b)* UDACE £	*(c)* NEGI £	*(d)* REPLAN £
1979-80	95,134	—	—	—
1980-81	98,507	—	—	—
1981-82	104,003	—	—	—
1982-83	144,036	—	—	—
1983-84	118,810	—	—	—
1984-85	114,625	70,756	—	523,617
1985-86	122,325	267,807	—	1,538,397
1986-87	125,831	267,228	—	1,653,915
1987-88	124,384	272,352	—	1,632,997
1988-89	170,693	273,934	57,308	1,601,196
1989-90	161,553	281,766	53,875	1,549,445
1990-91	195,280	293,000	53,000	1,473,000

The figures in the table result from adjusting the cash outturn figures for past years using the deflator for gross domestic product at market prices. The grant to UDACE excludes that to NEGI, which is shown separately.

Higher Education

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of young people over the age of 18 years are in higher education in each of the 12 member states of the European Community.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures in the following table represent participation at all ages, generally 18 and over.

New entrants[1] to higher education

Country[2] (main ages on entry)	*Latest year*	*Participation rate[3] Percentage*
Belgium (18–19)	1987	49
Denmark (18–20)	1987	43
France (18–20)	1987	34
Germany, West[4] (19–21)	1987	30
Greece[5]	1986	33
Ireland[5,6]	1986	29

Country[2] (main ages on entry)	Latest year	Participation rate[3] Percentage
Italy (19–21)	1987	27
Netherlands (18–20)	1987	39
Portugal[5 7]	1984	14
Spain (18–20)	1987	35
United Kingdom[7] (18–21)	1988	36

[1] Includes full-time and part-time students entering higher education for the first time, i.e. excluding postgraduate students and others already having a qualification in higher education. Not all other countries may adhere to this general definition.
[2] Compatible information is not available for Luxembourg since most higher education is undertaken abroad. Ireland figures partly estimated.
[3] To aid comparison and overcome the problem of the varying lengths of courses in different countries the participation rate is the percentage of all new entrants (defined above) related to a derived relevant single year group. The latter is calculated by taking the total populations for the ages providing at least 70 per cent. of the new entrants and dividing by the number of ages involved. For the United Kingdom this is the population of ages 18 to 21 divided by 4. OECD recommend this procedure.
[4] Partly estimated.
[5] Main ages on entry unavailable.
[6] Full-time only.
[7] Latest data available.
[8] Excludes the private sector and students from abroad. Includes nursing and paramedical students at Health Department establishments.

Standard Assessment Tasks

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total cost of designing, printing and implementing the standard assessment tasks for seven-year-olds, including the cost of the teachers' time involved.

Mr. Eggar: Up to 31 March 1991 the cost to the School Examinations and Assessment Council of securing the design, printing, distribution and evaluation of the standard assessment tasks for seven-year-olds was £5,661,755. The standard assessment tasks have been designed to be delivered by a single teacher using existing resources, and—apart from the individual reading test—to take no more than 30 hours, although the exact time will vary according to the circumstances of each class.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by *(a)* region and *(b)* for each local education authority the number of teacher vacancies in January 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991; and if he will show this figure also as a percentage of the total teaching force in each area.

Mr. Fallon: Provisional vacancy figures for 1991 were published on 17 May and are summarised in the table.

The 1991 figures are provisional and a breakdown by local education authority is not yet available. I am arranging for a copy of the numbers of vacancies by local education authority for 1988 to 1990 to be placed in the Library. Comparable figures for 1991 will be placed in the Library when available.

Vacancy[1] rates in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by region: 1988-91[2]

England

	Vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post[3] 1988	1989	1990	[2]1991	Number of vacancies [2]1991
All vacancies	1·2	1·5	1·8	1·6	5,584
By region:					
North	0·2	0·6	0·6	0·7	178
Yorkshire and Humberside	0·8	0·9	1·1	1·2	489
North West	0·8	1·0	1·0	1·0	546
East Midlands	0·8	0·9	0·9	0·9	285
West Midlands	1·1	1·1	1·3	1·3	552
East Anglia	0·6	0·7	1·0	1·2	170
Greater London	3·2	3·7	5·3	[4]3·6	1,686
Other South East	1·1	1·6	1·8	1·7	1,216
South West	1·0	1·1	1·8	1·5	462
England excluding Greater London	0·9	1·1	1·3	1·3	3,898
Total vacancies (numbers)	4,395	5,540	6,494	5,584	—

[1] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term's duration). Includes vacancies being filled on a temporary basis.
[2] Figures for 1991 are provisional.
[3] Teachers in post include full-time regular teachers in (or on secondment from) maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools, plus full-time regular divided service, peripatetic, advisory, remedial centre and miscellaneous teachers.
[4] The 1991 percentage vacancy rates for the inner and outer London weighting areas are 4·7 per cent. and 2·4 per cent. respectively.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the capital bid for 1991-92, *(b)* the capital allocation for 1991-92 and *(c)* the percentage that *(b)* represents *(a)* for each local education authority in England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Details of local education authority capital expenditure bids and education annual capital guidelines—ACGs—for 1991-92 are set out in the table, together with bids and allocations for work at voluntary aided and special agreement schools. No local education authority has ever expected to receive its ACG bid in full, and authorities bid on the basis that they will receive an ACG or allocation to the extent that the bid

matches national priority criteria. There is therefore no direct connection between the size of the bid and the level of the ACG or allocation distributed. The percentage figures in the last column are therefore devoid of any real significance.

Annual capital guidelines are not the only source of capital funding available to local education authorities.

Local education authority bids and ACGs for 1991-92 county and voluntary controlled schools and FE colleges

LEA	Total bid £000s	Total[1] ACG £000s	ACG as percentage of bid
Barking	5,449	573	11
Barnet	5,884	803	14
Bexley	6,976	1,891	27
Brent	9,208	1,233	13
Bromley	8,564	3,656	43
Croydon	23,427	1,996	9
Ealing	12,634	1,362	11
Enfield	19,437	1,971	10
Haringey	8,045	1,018	13
Harrow	3,934	1,057	27
Havering	4,558	1,945	43
Hillingdon	10,218	1,005	10
Hounslow	5,128	1,516	30
Kingston	5,346	1,303	24
Merton	8,305	1,304	16
Newham	15,546	8,587	55
Redbridge	4,484	752	17
Richmond	5,269	954	18
Sutton	10,812	3,364	31
Waltham	10,818	3,386	31
City	0	2	n/a
Camden	4,133	885	21
Westminster	7,441	624	8
Greenwich	2,310	676	29
Hackney	8,206	1,992	24
Hammersmith	6,697	1,235	18
Islington	6,166	1,010	16
Kensington	7,995	1,846	23
Lambeth	9,067	1,152	13
Lewisham	10,318	2,512	24
Southwark	6,061	1,258	21
Wandsworth	15,632	1,374	9
Tower Hamlets[2]	34,963	14,619	42
Birmingham	23,060	11,083	48
Coventry	8,962	2,180	24
Dudley	12,969	9,508	73
Sandwell	9,498	1,313	14
Solihull	5,198	1,883	36
Walsall	4,414	1,410	32
Wolverhampton	6,714	2,067	31
Knowsley	6,249	1,173	19
Liverpool	18,286	5,763	32
St. Helens	8,522	2,823	33
Sefton	6,465	4,208	65
Wirral	6,057	3,379	56
Bolton	3,925	899	23
Bury	2,598	1,254	48
Manchester	29,609	4,697	16
Oldham	14,498	8,522	59
Rochdale	14,718	8,071	55
Salford	8,198	3,433	42
Stockport	3,048	1,919	63
Tameside	2,871	1,744	61
Trafford	6,786	3,683	54
Wigan	11,797	7,462	63
Barnsley	2,383	806	34
Doncaster	1,686	375	22
Rotherham	4,433	1,039	23
Sheffield	5,123	1,371	27
Bradford	28,244	9,355	33
Calderdale	2,720	1,661	61
Kirklees	7,170	3,797	53
Leeds	46,141	16,372	35
Wakefield	12,479	2,275	18
Gateshead	10,582	2,840	27
Newcastle	10,634	2,332	22
North Tyneside	4,759	729	15
South Tyneside	8,228	1,988	24
Sunderland	9,854	3,072	31
Isles of Scilly	215	16	8
Avon	22,096	4,945	22
Bedfordshire	9,812	1,974	20
Berkshire	10,312	3,282	32
Buckinghamshire	15,555	7,124	46
Cambridgeshire	32,006	8,536	27
Cheshire	12,008	5,257	44
Cleveland	12,555	2,979	24
Cornwall	20,719	6,828	33
Cumbria	19,610	9,629	49
Derbyshire	29,640	21,330	72
Devon	25,298	7,715	30
Dorset	13,915	2,605	19
Durham	24,188	6,911	29
East Sussex	32,015	16,761	52
Essex	75,926	22,210	29
Gloucestershire	16,106	6,442	40
Hampshire	42,960	16,517	38
Hereford and Worcester	14,373	6,774	47
Hertfordshire	16,162	6,524	40
Humberside	25,167	8,371	33
Isle of Wight	7,006	2,263	32
Kent	51,039	23,773	47
Lancashire	36,626	22,789	62
Leicestershire	15,209	6,922	46
Lincolnshire	26,069	10,016	38
Norfolk	11,444	2,779	24
North Yorkshire	6,903	4,575	66
Northamptonshire	13,987	8,641	62
Northumberland	5,565	3,545	64
Nottinghamshire	12,741	5,167	41
Oxfordshire	24,896	6,601	27
Shropshire	17,455	6,582	38
Somerset	12,397	4,979	40
Staffordshire	12,391	8,644	70
Suffolk	20,681	9,989	48
Surrey	13,332	5,538	42
Warwickshire	6,696	1,644	25
West Sussex	14,956	3,508	23
Wiltshire	16,446	4,973	30

[1] This column represents the ACGs announced in December 1990. Some supplementary credit approvals have been and will be issued during the course of the year.

[2] The ACG for Tower Hamlets includes £3·7 million which will be issued as an SCA during the course of the year.

Voluntary aided and special agreement schools 1991-92 total capital bids and allocations

LEA	Total bid (£000) 1991-92	Total allocation (£000) 1991-92	Allocation as per cent age of bid
City of London	97	—	—
Camden	1,055	226	21
Greenwich	201	36	18
Hackney	442	195	44
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,357	1,295	95
Islington	181	173	96
Kensington	3,580	2,640	74
Lambeth	937	70	7
Lewisham	329	65	20
Southwark	1,616	861	53
Tower Hamlets	597	334	56
Wandsworth	203	49	24
Westminster	346	324	94
Barking	1,955	1,955	100
Barnet	3,605	718	20
Bexley	2,341	305	13

LEA	Total bid (£000) 1991-92	Total allocation (£000) 1991-92	Allocation as per cent age of bid
Brent	196	35	18
Bromley	429	198	46
Croyden	3,051	1,814	59
Ealing	315	—	—
Enfield	812	302	37
Haringey	1,412	1,163	82
Harrow	172	—	—
Havering	311	147	47
Hillingdon	405	20	5
Hounslow	236	53	22
Kingston	646	—	—
Merton	228	98	43
Newham	284	134	47
Redbridge	3,399	116	3
Richmond	902	195	22
Sutton	3,374	2,354	70
Waltham Forest	1,800	300	17
Birmingham	3,539	1,113	31
Coventry	1,570	1,369	87
Dudley	2,385	2,006	84
Sandwell	351	7	2
Solihull	687	55	8
Walsall	400	—	—
Wolverhampton	614	61	10
Knowsley	1,288	571	44
Liverpool	6,120	4,493	73
St. Helens	2,299	2,149	93
Sefton	2,233	1,750	78
Wirral	1,037	631	61
Bolton	984	436	44
Bury	830	574	69
Manchester	1,305	827	63
Oldham	609	174	29
Rochdale	756	436	58
Salford	567	343	60
Stockport	341	291	85
Tameside	136	35	26
Trafford	781	715	92
Wigan	2,126	1,108	52
Barnsley	25	25	100
Doncaster	145	145	100
Rotherham	385	158	41
Sheffield	945	127	13
Bradford	1,002	873	87
Calderdale	634	444	70
Kirklees	326	218	67
Leeds	12,628	12,288	97
Wakefield	346	180	52
Gateshead	449	64	14
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,050	847	81
North Tyneside	454	203	45
South Tyneside	59	21	36
Sunderland	523	116	22
Avon	1,342	619	46
Bedfordshire	1,127	600	53
Berkshire	723	358	50
Buckinghamshire	2,401	2,207	92
Cambridgeshire	825	79	10
Cheshire	3,324	1,997	60
Cleveland	884	398	45
Cornwall	508	369	73
Cumbria	1,464	869	59
Derbyshire	1,106	889	80
Devon	2,951	567	19
Dorset	6,734	3,985	59
Durham	1,103	718	65
East Sussex	1,319	1,065	81
Essex	1,264	1,010	80
Gloucestershire	1,694	1,229	73
Hampshire	2,994	1,926	64
Hereford and Worcester	2,580	1,356	53
Hertfordshire	2,302	1,656	72
Humberside	1,400	46	3
Isle of Wight	260	210	81
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—
Kent	7,737	2,837	37
Lancashire	6,534	4,051	62
Leicestershire	967	598	62
Lincolnshire	1,753	276	16
Norfolk	587	13	2
North Yorkshire	2,005	775	39
Northamptonshire	400	27	7
Northumberland	1,175	747	64
Nottinghamshire	1,359	135	10
Oxfordshire	2,952	2,526	86
Shropshire	423	238	56
Somerset	2,135	2,041	96
Staffordshire	2,001	979	49
Suffolk	890	345	39
Surrey	2,965	839	28
Warwickshire	3,112	788	25
West Sussex	2,129	1,875	88
Wiltshire	1,677	1,068	64

South West London College

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what discussions he has had with the governors of South West London college as to their views on the future of this college; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with the director of education of the London borough of Wandsworth as to the views of the council on the future of South West London college in Tooting; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will meet the hon. Member for Tooting and representatives of staff and students of South West London college, Tooting, before any decision is taken as to the possible closure of this college.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The governors of South West London college wrote to the Department on 10 May 1991 about the future of the college. The director of education of the London borough of Wandsworth wrote on 15 May about its further education provision. I am meeting the hon. Member. My right hon. and learned Friend will be considering all the views expressed before reaching his decision.

Brighton CTC

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science at what price the site of Brighton city technology college, referred to in the answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn of 3 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *627*, is now being offered for sale; what is the difference between that price and the total cost of purchase including agents' and legal fees; and what will be the total anticipated loss to the public purse, after taking account of interest forgone on the moneys used to make the purchase.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The site that was purchased for use as a city technology college in Brighton is being offered for sale with a guide price of £2 million on the advice of agents. The original cost of purchase was £2·3 milion net, in addition to which £54,000 was spent on legal fees. As no

sale has yet been agreed for the site, it is not possible to calculate the loss or gain to the public purse as a result of its purchase and resale.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether Mr. Revere was required to repay any interest earned by him, or forgone by the public purse, in respect of the commission charged by him in respect of the purchase of the site of the then proposed Brighton city technology college, referred to in the answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn of 3 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *627*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The commission was repaid in full upon its discovery.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has been involved in any discussions with the East Sussex police about the charging by Mr. Ivor Revere of commission on the purchase of the site of the then proposed Brighton city technology college; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State referred the handling of the purchase of the property to the appropriate authorities for investigation. The investigation has been completed and I have been advised that no further action is contemplated by these authorities.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps have been taken to improve the financial control of the city technology college programme following the discovery of financial improprieties in respect of the then proposed Brighton city technology college.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The financial procedures of the CTC programme are subject to continual review and improvement by my Department.

Students (Maintenance)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what support will be given from public funds towards students' maintenance in the academic year 1991-92.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary regulations, the maximum rates of loan for the academic year 1991-92 in the United Kingdom will be as follows:

	Full year rate £	*Final year rate* £
Students living away from home:		
In London	660	480
Elsewhere	580	425
Students living at home	460	335

As already announced, the main rates of maintenance grant for mandatory award holders from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and their equivalents in Scotland, will be the same as in the current academic year. The rates for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are shown in the table; Scottish rates are slightly different.

	£
Students living away from home:	
In London	2,845
Elsewhere	2,265
Students living at home	1,795

These grant and loan rates will enbable full year student support in the United Kingdom to increase by 6 per cent next year.

Science Budget

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the distribution to the research councils, the Royal Society and the Fellowship of Engineering, of the sums that were left unallocated when the science budget planning figures for 1992-93 and 1993 were indicatively distributed.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have received further advice on the distribution of these unallocated sums from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, and have decided to accept the board's recommendation that, subject to approval by Parliament of the estimates in due course, the following additions should be made to the indicative allocations already announced for 1992-93 and 1993-94:

£ million

	1992-93	*1993-94*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	3·1	3·5
Economic and Social Research Council	2·1	2·7
Medical Research Council	5·6	6·2
Natural Environment Research Council	3·8	4·4
Science and Engineering Research Council	[1]20·8	[1]22·5
Royal Society	0·9	1·1
Fellowship of Engineering	0·2	0·2
Total	36·5	[2]40·6

[1] SERC's figures includes £5 million in each year for enhanced supercomputing facilities for use by research councils and institutions of higher education.

[2] The ABRC has not yet considered the distribution of £17·3 million of the unallocated sum for 1993-94.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Clubs

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many people *(a)* were members of job clubs on 1 April 1990, *(b)* have joined job clubs, from 1 April 1990 to the latest possible date and *(c)* have left job clubs, from 1 April 1990 to the latest possible date; and what were the destinations of those job club leavers, showing how many entered jobs;

(2) if he will give the destination, ethnic backgrounds and numbers of people who have left job clubs since 1 April 1990, broken down to show *(a)* the results for each region and for Great Britain as a whole and *(b)* the results for people leaving either external or internal job clubs.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Restart

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have attended a restart interview since 1 April 1990, to the latest available date, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; and what were the results of those interviews, broken down in the manner of the answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) of 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *148*.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were refused unemployment benefit in the Blyth Valley area under the actively seeking work rules since 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any proposals to enable or encourage greater co-operation between chambers of commerce and training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is keen to encourage the greatest possible degree of co-operation between training and enterprise councils (TECs) and all the key players in the local business support network. Working closely together in concert avoids wasteful duplication of effort, and makes the best use of both public and private sector funding. I am pleased to report that many TEC plans make working with their local chamber of commerce a leading priority. In many cases, TEC board members are directors of their local chamber of commerce, and vice versa.

Pneumoconiosis

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now undertake to review the working of the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 with a view to establishing whether certain categories of claimants have failed to secure reasonable compensation under the terms of this Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Government have no current plans to review the working of the compensation scheme which this Act provides. It considers that the Act has well served, and continues to serve, the original purpose intended by Parliament in providing a measure of compensation to sufferers from certain dust diseases who have little chance of obtaining compensation through the courts because the relevant employer is no longer in business. The Government has fully met its commitment to Parliament to review the compensation paid with the aim of maintaining its value.

Sick Building Syndrome

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research the Health and Safety Executive has carried out into sick building syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is to commission a comprehensive and critical review of current published literature on sick building syndrome to enable it to consider the production of a guidance leaflet. The results of this review are expected to be available by the end of the year.

The HSE is also evaluating a proposal from an external research unit concerning possible epidemiological studies on this subject.

Work Accidents

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the total number of injuries as a result of work activities reported to enforcement authorities in the five counties of the east midlands region for each year since 1986-87 in the categories (i) fatal, (ii) non-fatal major, (iii) over three days and (iv) total reported in *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* energy, *(c)* manufacturing, *(d)* construction and *(e)* services.

Mr. Forth: The available information for the whole of the east midlands region is provided in table 1. Analysis by individual counties could be provided only at disproportionate cost for all injury severities. However, table 2 provides such analysis for the reported fatalities which have been aggregated for the four years since 1986-87 in view of the small numbers involved.

Table 1
Numbers of reported occupational injuries[1] in the East Midlands region 1986-87 to 1989-90 (provisional)

Standard industrial classification 1980 sector	*Fatal*	*Non-fatal major[2]*	*Over 3 day[3]*	*Total reported*
1986-87				
Agriculture	[5]n.a.	41	148	189
Energy[4]	1	53	632	686
Manufacturing	6	677	5,427	6,110
Construction	8	138	909	1,055
Services	7	2,019	3,967	5,993
All industries[6]	22	2,928	11,083	14,033
1987-88				
Agriculture	[5]n.a.	72	182	254
Energy[4]	1	228	1,829	2,058

Standard industrial classification 1980 sector	Fatal	Non-fatal major[2]	Over 3 day[3]	Total reported
Manufacturing	6	714	4,822	5,542
Construction	9	148	884	1,041
Services	11	1,806	4,129	5,946
All industries[6]	27	2,968	11,846	14,841
1988-89				
Agriculture	1	73	193	267
Energy[4]	5	242	2,672	2,919
Manufacturing	9	680	5,409	6,098
Construction	7	171	954	1,132
Services	7	1,852	4,166	6,025
All industries[6]	29	3,018	13,394	16,441
1989-90[7]				
Agriculture	4	58	165	227
Energy[4]	8	208	2,128	2,344
Manufacturing	9	607	5,886	6,502
Construction	5	199	1,235	1,439
Services	19	2,027	4,332	6,378
All industries[6]	45	3,106	13,762	16,913

Table 2
Numbers of reported fatal injuries (a) in the East Midlands region 1986-87 to 1989-90 (provisional)

Standard Industrial Classification 1980	County				
	Derbyshire	Leicestershire	Lincolnshire	Northamptonshire	Nottinghamshire
Sector					
Agriculture[5]	1	—	—	—	4
Energy	3	2	—	—	10
Manufacturing	6	3	4	4	13
Construction	5	6	10	1	7
Services	6	8	9	9	12
All Industries	21	19	23	14	46

[1] Injuries to employees, self-employed persons and non-employed persons injured in a working environment, reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985 (RIDDOR), to all enforcement authorities excluding HSE's Railway Inspectorate.
[2] As defined under RIDDOR
[3] Injuries causing incapacity for work for more than three days.
[4] Excludes injuries reported to HSE's inspectorate of mines and quarries.
[5] Analysis by county of fatal injuries reported to HSE's agricultural inspectorate in 1986-87 and 1987-88 not available.
[6] Including a small number of injuries not classified by industry.
[7] provisional.
n.a. not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

6. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made on the proposed new airport development in Hong Kong.

24. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation as regards the proposed airport development plan in Hong Kong.

Mr. Hurd: Talks with the Chinese Government on Hong Kong's airport project resumed on 18 May. We and the Chinese Government agree that Hong Kong needs a new airport and we are making intensive efforts to secure Chinese support for the project.

Antarctica

7. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent meeting of Antarctic treaty parties in Madrid.

32. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Madrid conference on the future of Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 May to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) in which he stated that the Government warmly welcome the outcome of the Madrid meeting and hope that the draft protocol tabled there will provide the basis for comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment.

Further, the Prime Minister indicated that of particular importance are the provisions for a ban on mineral activity for 50 years, and mechanisms for review of the ban after 50 years, or before if everyone agrees.

The results of these provisions would be that there can never be mining in Antarctica unless all the present consultative parties agree.

Weapons Control

19. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Hurd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 24 April at column 1072.

20. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to clarify the Soviet disarmament figures.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our NATO partners are continuing to press the Soviet Union to ensure the full and early implementation of the CFE treaty.

30. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are working to strengthen existing regimes of restriction and control. We have already reinforced and widened the scope of our export controls on chemical weapons precursors. We are considering urgently how to improve the regimes to prevent the export of technology and materials for biological weapons.

We shall also be working:

for further accessions to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty

to strengthen the international safeguards administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency

to harmonise and improve existing export controls through the Zangger committee, nuclear suppliers group and Australia group

to secure a commitment to the early negotiation of a chemical weapons convention and the strengthening of the biological weapons convention at its review conference in September

and to strengthen the missile technology control regime.

Albania

21. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Albania.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Her Majesty's Government have decided in principle to re-establish diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Albania, in response to the offer made when the Albanian Foreign Minister called on me on 13 May. We are in touch with the Albanian authorities about the form and timing of an announcement.

Taiwan

22. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has plans to make an official visit to Taiwan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to do so.

Bangladesh

23. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom-Bangladesh relations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have very good relations with the newly elected democratic Government of Bangladesh and are working closely with them in the relief effort following the recent cyclone.

Poland

25. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Poland to discuss its entry into the European Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no present plans to visit Poland. We believe that the option of full membership of the European Community should be available to Poland when she is able to meet the political and economic obligations it entails.

Iraq

26. **Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of relief operations in northern Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The relief operation is going well. Refugees are coming down from the mountains in increasing numbers. With the assistance of allied forces, many are returning to their homes. United Nations staff are now also working in the area.

Israel

27. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Israel and the occupied territories; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Dr. Hampson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Israel and the occupied territories.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend last visited Israel and the occupied territories in October 1990. Since then we have stayed in regular contact with the Israeli Foreign Minister. I visited Israel and the occupied territories from 6 to 9 May. I had detailed discussions with leading Israelis and Palestinians on the peace process. I urged both sides to show the flexibility necessary for Mr. Baker's initiative to succeed.

Middle East

29. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the middle east peace process.

33. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in the middle east.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome continuing American efforts to restart the middle east peace process. With our EC partners, we have given them our full support. There has been some progress towards acceptance of the idea of a peace conference. Important differences remain but there is enough encouragement to all of us to wear down those differences in order to get a conference under way.

Cuba

31. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Cuba to discuss restrictions on British trade with Cuba.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans. We have normal trade relations with Cuba.

South Africa

34. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to visit South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs plans to visit South Africa during the summer.

China

35. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what attempts the British Government are making to improve relations with the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We want to have a full and constructive relationship with the People's Republic of China. We are seeking to intensify our co-operation over Hong Kong in order to bring about the full implementation of the joint declaration. Since the October Foreign Affairs Council's decision to relax most of the EC Twelve's measures against China, we have restored a number of areas of contact and cooperation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' visit to Peking in April was a further step in this process.

Kuwait

36. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his visit to Kuwait.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 8 May at cols 473-75.

Third World

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with other Foreign Ministers to discuss third world matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs regularly discusses third world matters with other foreign ministers.

President Aylwin

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the visit to the United Kingdom in April of President Aylwin of Chile.

Mr. Garel-Jones: President Aylwin visited the United Kingdom from 10-15 April. Among others, he met Her Majesty the Queen and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. His Foreign Minister, Mr. Silva Cimma, signed a memorandum of understanding with me on co-operation against drugs. The visit served to underline Chile's return to democratic government.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not so far set up any "next steps" agencies. However, it has been agreed that the Wilton Park conference centre will be established as an agency. Our aim is to launch it on 1 September.

The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) has one agency—the National Resources Institute. The ODA has no further candidates under consideration at present.

Visas (Bombay)

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that applicants attending for interview for visas do not have to queue for long periods of time in the main road outside the British high commission in Bombay.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British Deputy High Commission in Bombay is moving to new accommodation on 23 May which will provide better facilities for applicants waiting to apply for visas. An improved lay-out and a larger waiting area inside the building should ensure that applications are processed more quickly.

The new address is:

Maker Chambers IV
222 Jamnalal Bajaj Road
(PO Box) 11714
Nariman Point
Bombay 400 021

Egypt (Christians)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation has been made to the Egyptian Government regarding the treatment of Moustaffa Mohammed Said al Sharkawi, Mohammed Hussein Sallam and Hassan Muhammed Ismael Muhammed and others who have embraced the Christian religion.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the matter with the then Egyptian Foreign Minister in Cairo on 1 May. He told Dr. Abdel Meguid of the widespread concern in Britain at the detention of the three Christians.

Miss Valerie Howell

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Mr. H. C. Barnes, a constituent of the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, has received no replies to his inquiries of 28 February and 7 April concerning the death of Miss Valerie Howell in Zimbabwe; and what disposition has been, or is being, made of the late Miss Howell's effects.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the inquiries to which my hon. Friend refers were addressed to the authorities of another sovereign state, of which Miss Howell was a citizen, I am not in a position to explain the absence of replies.

I have no information about the disposition of her effects. This could best be pursued through legal channels in Zimbabwe and details of local lawyers have been sent to Mr. Barnes.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from the high commission in Zimbabwe about the murder in October 1990 of a British citizen, Valerie Howell, in the area of Northwood, Harare; and if Her Majesty's consul in Harare has been in contact with the Zimbabwean CID in respect of its investigations and undertaking to report via the Zimbabwean high commission in London to the late Miss Howell's relative Mr. H. C. Barnes, a constituent of the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As a Zimbabwe/British dual national who had made a form of renunciation of British nationality to the Zimbabwe authorities, in Zimbabwe law the late Miss Howell was a Zimbabwe citizen only. Under international convention Her Majesty's consul in Harare has no standing to receive or request information about matters relating to her.

The High Commission in Harare ia aware only that Miss Howell died at her home in Zimbabwe on 27 October 1990 and that murder was suspected.

Iraq

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the leaders of the Kurdish people in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I last met representatives of Iraqi opposition groups on 22 April 1991. These included three representatives from Kurdish organisations. The delegation expressed their gratitude for Britain's support for Iraqi refugees.

European Community

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards increasing the number of countries in membership of the EC.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Community has agreed that there should be no decisions on enlargement until 1993. We support enlargement thereafter to include those countries which are qualified to join and able to take on all the obligations of membership.

Turkey

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey concerning article 39 of the treaty of Lausanne and the Kurdish language.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have not made representations to the Government of Turkey regarding article 39 of the treaty of Lausanne. We have noted the recent decision of the Turkish Cabinet to ease restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Turkey, concerning the theft of emergency supplies from Kurdish refugee camps in Turkey by members of the Turkish army; and to what extent such incidents have occurred.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No representations have been made to the Turkish authorities, who have formally denied press allegations of the theft of emergency supplies by members of the Turkish army. We are not aware of any other reports of any looting of relief aid.

Mr. Mohinder Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many invitations have been issued to Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi since 1979 to attend official functions organised by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have checked records available to us and can find no trace of a recent invitation. However, information as far back as 1979 is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States of America and the European Community about the creation of comprehensive multilateral arms export control regimes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in discussion with them on how to promote a more responsible multilateral approach to arms sales, and we are pursuing with them my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's proposal, launched at the European Council in Luxembourg on 8 April, for a United Nations arms register.

Angola

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the situation in Angola and Her Majesty's Government's policy towards achieving a political settlement there.

Mrs. Chalker: We congratulate the Government of Angola and UNITA on reaching a ceasefire agreement and hope that this will formally enter into force on 31 May. We have strongly supported the peace process and will play our part in helping Angola find her feet again.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing (i) for each of the years 1970-71 to 1991-92 an analysis by class of authority within standard region of non-domestic rateable values, average poundages, actual payments, and uncollected non-domestic rate revenues and (ii) for each of the years 1970-71 to 1989-90 by class of authority within standard region of domestic rateable values, gross rates, rates net of rebates, and uncollected domestic rate revenue.

Mr. Portillo: I have arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local authority in England the number of persons accepted as homeless in each year since 1979 inclusive.

Sir George Young: I have today placed in the Library a table giving the numbers of households for whom local authorities accepted responsibility for securing accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985, for each year from 1981 to 1990.

In a majority of cases, the main immediate reasons for acceptance by local authorities were that their relations or friends were no longer willing or able to house them or as a result of the breakdown of a relationship. Those accepted will either have been rehoused directly, found temporary accommodation, or enabled to stay in existing accommodation until suitable permanent housing was found.

Information for the years 1979 and 1980 is available in edition No. 54—table 14—edition No. 61—table 11—and edition No. 62—table 13—of "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales", copies of which are in the Library.

A new reporting system was introduced for non-metropolitan districts in the fourth quarter of 1980 and for metropolitan districts and the London boroughs in the third quarter of 1982, so that the figures are not directly comparable over the whole period.

Refuse Collection

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue new guidelines to local authorities for the collection of refuse from composite premises.

Mr. Baldry: My predecessor and I have both issued clear guidelines on this matter. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on 15 January this year. We intend to amend the Collection and Disposal of Waste Regulations 1988 to reinforce this guidance as soon as is practicable.

County Hall, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use is currently being made of county hall.

Mr. Key: County hall is currently unoccupied pending its intended disposal by the London residuary body.

Thurrock Borough Council

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an order declaring Thurrock borough council to be in default of its duties in respect of public health by its decision to end its service of emptying cesspools in part of its area, and ordering it to resume these functions within one month.

Mr. Baldry: No: my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no powers to do so. It is acceptable for local authorities to nominate private contractors, by means of competitive tender, to empty cesspools on their behalf. I understand that Thurrock borough council is merely mainatining a list of contractors willing to provide a service: this would not in my Department's view be sufficient to discharge the council's legal obligations to provide a service on request on payment of a reasonable fee. My officials have drawn these views to the council's attention.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against the uniform business rate have been lodged in the areas covering the parliamentary constituency of Blyth Valley.

Mr. Key: By 31 March 1991, the valuation office had received 836 proposals to alter the 1990 rating list in respect of the area of the parliamentary constituency of Blyth Valley.

Chromium Compound Emissions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of industrial sites known to his Department which emit chromium compounds into the atmosphere; and what is the damage to public health from these substances.

Mr. Baldry: The major potential sources of chromium emissions must be registered on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Alkali etc. Works Regulation Act 1906.

Certificates of registration have been issued for the following such works.

Name of discharger and Location

Ferro-Alloys and Metals Limited—Glossop, Derbyshire
Murex Limited—Rainham, Essex
Harcros Chemicals UK Limited—Eaglescliffe, Cleveland
London & Scandinavia Metallurgical Co. Limited—Rotherham, South Yorkshire

Additionally a number of industrial processes may emit small quantities of chromium. Such processes will be progressively controlled, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, during the next five years.

The effect of airborne emissions of chromium compounds on public health is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Fire Regulations

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration has been given to the concern fire officers, insurers and others expressed for the safety of life and property in response to the original consultation paper of March 1990 in preparing the revised England and Wales Building Regulations (Fire).

Mr. Yeo: Officials will shortly be meeting representatives of the chief fire officers to discuss their concerns about the proposals which have been put forward for the revision of part B—safety in fire—of the Building Regulations 1985. Similar meetings have already been held with other representatives of the fire service, with fire insurers, and with a considerable number of other bodies who have commented on the proposals. Together with the written comments, the views expressed at these meetings will be fully taken into account when final decisions on these proposals come to be taken.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the results of consultation on the England and Wales Building Regulations (Fire) will be announced.

Mr. Yeo: The detailed outcome of the review of part B—safety in fire—of the Building Regulations 1985 is likely to be anounced in the autumn.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to ensure that the introduction of any new England and Wales Building Regulations (Fire) does not result in higher costs due to higher insurance premiums.

Mr. Yeo: There have been discussions with fire insurers about the proposals for the revision of part B—safety in fire—of the Building Regulations 1985. Their views will be fully taken into account when final decisions on these proposals come to be taken. However, the primary purpose of the regulations is to protect the health and safety of people, while fire insurers are also concerned with the protection of property. The regulations represent minimum requirements. There is no reason however why buildings should not be constructed to higher standards to meet any insurance requirements related to the protection of property.

Common Land

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), *Official Report*, 26 March, columns *352-53*, if he will set out the reservations expressed by each interested party on common land legislation; if he will place copies of written representations from each interested party in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In the discussions held with all major interests following the Government statement of 26 July 1990, views were sought both on the content of prospective comprehensive common land legislation and on the alternative of a short Bill to prevent deregistration. Apart from the national access bodies, the majority of the interests consulted indicated opposition, in varying degrees, to the latter.

After various amenity bodies wrote to Ministers in October 1990 suggesting that the Government introduce a short Bill, the Countryside Commission, the Government's statutory adviser on this matter, confirmed in writing its continued lack of support for this proposal, and the National Farmers Union wrote confirming their opposition. We have no authority from these bodies to place their representations in the Library.

Society of Fire Protection Engineers

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representation there is on the committee advising him on the England and Wales Building Regulations (Fire) from the Society of Fire Protection Engineers.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *201*.

EC Labelling Scheme

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *354*, whether there has been any progress on development of an eco-labelling scheme for the United Kingdom; whether he has received any notification from the European Commission on the development of a Community-wide labelling scheme; what is his policy on whether such a scheme should be voluntary; and when he considers implementation of such a scheme might commence.

Mr. Baldry: The Government have made it clear they support the introduction of a voluntary eco-labelling scheme, and that they would prefer this to be part of an arrangement covering the whole of the European Community. However, if there is undue delay in agreeing a Community scheme we will go ahead with introducing a national scheme. We want an official eco-labelling scheme to be in place as soon as possible, and expect the first labels to be awarded during 1992.

House Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing by fifths, sevenths and tenths the value of dwellings and of households incomes before tax.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Right to Buy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local housing authorities in England who have put forward schemes under the Housing Act 1988 to provide council tenants with a cash grant to help them buy a home in the private sector; how many houses have been purchased to date under the provisions in each of those district council areas; what was the minimum and maximum level of grants paid to each area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Local authority cash incentive schemes can be a valuable means of helping tenants into home ownership while releasing vacancies for reletting to homeless people. Table 1 lists schemes approved to date and gives the maximum grant payable under each scheme. Further schemes for 1991-92 are under consideration.

Authorities report annually on the outturn of their schemes. Table 2 gives the number of properties bought with assistance under 1989-90 schemes and average grants paid: information on maximum and minimum grants paid is not readily available. Reports on 1990-91 schemes are still being received.

Table 1

£ thousands

Local authority	1989-90 Maximum grant available	1990-91 Maximum grant available	1991-92 Maximum grant available
Eastern			
Aylesbury Vale	11·000	20·000	24·000
Broxbourne	—	—	28·000
Colchester	10·000	20·000	20·000
Dacorum	—	—	25·000
East Hertfordshire	—	—	27·500
Harlow	10·000	10·000	—
Huntingdon	—	13·000	—
North Hertfordshire	—	—	14·000
Luton	13·000	13·000	15·000
Maldon	—	12·500	—
Peterborough	—	5·000	5·000
Rochford	11·250	11·250	26·700
St. Albans	13·000	25·000	25·000
South Buckinghamshire	11·000	11·000	—
Southend	—	15·000	15·000
South Norfolk	—	—	13·000
Stevenage	—	—	15·000
Three Rivers	—	7·000	7·000
Watford	12·000	13·500	15·000
East Midlands			
Amber Valley	—	5·000	—
Charnwood	—	10·000	—
Daventry	—	10·000	—
East Northants.	—	6·000	6·000
South Kesteven	8·000	8·000	—
London			
Barnet	—	20·000	20·000
Brent	—	20·000	20·000
Bromley	13·000	13·000	13·000
Camden	—	20·000	25·000
Croydon	13·000	22·000	22·500
Ealing	13·000	15·000	22·000
Enfield	—	20·000	20·000
Hackney	—	20·000	20·000
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	18·000	20·000
Haringey	—	20·000	20·000
Harrow	12·500	25·000	25·000
Havering	13·000	16·000	16·000
Hillingdon	—	26·554	26·554
Hounslow	—	15·000	20·000
Islington	—	25·000	25·000
Kensington and Chelsea	—	25·000	33·000
Kingston upon Thames	—	—	20·000
Lambeth	—	20·000	20·000
Lewisham	—	15·000	15·000
London			
Merton	—	27·000	28·000
Redbridge	—	28·000	28·000
Richmond	—	25·000	20·000
Southwark	—	10·000	15·000
Sutton	—	—	18·000
Tower Hamlets	—	—	21·000
Waltham Forest	—	—	25·000
Wandsworth	13·000	22·000	22·000
Westminster	13·000	20·000	20·000
South East			
Adur	10·000	10·000	16·000
Arun	10·000	10·000	10·000
Basingstoke and Deane	—	25·000	—
Bracknell	—	—	22·500
Brighton	—	20·000	20·000
Canterbury	—	22·500	24·500
Cherwell	—	12·500	10·000
Chichester	—	—	24·000
Dartford	—	—	24·000
Dover	—	22·000	22·000
Eastbourne	—	—	20·000
East Hampshire	—	10·000	25·000
Eastleigh	—	—	21·600
Elmbridge	—	20·000	20·000
Fareham	—	21·495	21·000
Gillingham	8·000	15·000	15·000
Guildford	—	—	28·800
Gosport	—	—	18·000
Gravesham	10·000	10·000	10·000
Hart	8·000	25·000	25·000
Hastings	—	10·000	10·000
Havant	—	15·000	15·000
Horsham	—	17·000	17·000
Hove	—	20·000	20·000
Lewes	—	10·000	—
Maidstone	—	25·000	25·000
Mole Valley	—	—	25·000
New Forest	10·000	17·000	15·000
Oxford	—	15·000	15·000
Portsmouth	—	20·000	15·000
Reading	—	20·000	25·000
Reigate and Banstead	—	20·000	20·000
Rochester	8·000	—	—
Rother	—	23·000	23·000
Runnymede	—	14·000	20·000
Rushmoor	8·000	12·000	15·000
Shepway	13·000	21·600	20·800
Slough	13·000	13·000	12·5000
Southampton	—	15·000	15·000
South East			
Spelthorne	12·000	24·000	24·000
Tandridge	12·000	12·000	12·000
Test Valley	10·000	10·000	10·000
Thanet	—	—	20·000
Tonbridge and Malling	—	25·000	—
Tunbridge Wells	12·000	24·000	22·000
Vale of White Horse	—	15·000	15·000
Wealden	6·000	20·000	20·000
West Oxfordshire	—	20·000	—
Woking	—	13·500	25·000
Wokingham	—	—	25·000
Worthing	—	15·000	15·000
South West			
Bournemouth	—	10·000	—
Carrick	5·000	10·000	—
Exeter	—	10·000	10·000
Kennet	10·000	10·000	10·000
Mendip	10·000	10·000	10·000
North Cornwall	7·500	7·500	—
North Wiltshire	—	10·000	—
Poole	7·500	7·500	8·500
Purbeck	—	10·000	—
Salisbury	—	10·000	—
South Somerset	—	10·000	—
Stroud	—	—	10·000
Taunton Deane	10·000	10·000	—
Teignbridge	7·500	7·500	—
Woodspring	—	—	10·000
West Midlands			
Malvern Hills	—	—	10·000
Solihull	—	8·000	—
Stafford	—	10·000	—
Wyre Forest	—	—	10·000
Yorkshire and Humberside			
Hambleton	—	10·000	10·000

Table 2

Local Authority	*1989-90 Schemes*	
	Average grant paid (£)	*Properties purchased*
Eastern		
Aylesbury Vale	11·0	1 (1)
Colchester	8·3	9 (9)
Harlow	8·3	3 (1)
Luton	0·0	0 (0)
Rochford	10·0	1 (1)
St. Albans	13·0	1 (0)
South Buckingham	9·0	1 (1)
Watford	0·0	0 (0)
East Midlands		
South Kesteven	6·6	8 (8)
London		
Bromley	10·5	92 (52)
Croydon	13·0	1 (0)
Ealing	10·8	39 (19)
Harrow	12·5	16 (8)
Havering	11·5	20 (8)
Wandsworth	11·4	29 (5)
Westminster	12·8	55 (0)
South East		
Adur	10·0	12 (12)
Arun	10·0	1 (0)
Gillingham	8·0	2 (1)
Gravesham	10·0	1 (0)
Hart	8·0	1 (1)
New Forest	7·4	9 (7)
Rochester	6·2	5 (1)
Rushmoor	7·0	2 (0)
Shepway	10·4	4 (3)
Slough	12·0	2 (0)
Spelthorne	0·0	0 (0)
Tandridge	12·0	12 (2)
Test Valley	10·0	3 (1)
Tunbridge Wells	11·0	2 (2)
Wealden	6·0	4 (2)
South West		
Kennet	10·0	3 (3)
Mendip	10·0	12 (7)
North Cornwall	7·5	2 (2)
Poole	5·5	4 (3)
Taunton Deane	8·8	24 (20)
Teignbridge	7·5	1 (0)

Note: Numbers in parentheses relate to properties purchased within the boundary of the local authority.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects to recieve the report of the second public inquiry on the east London river crossing; and when he will announce his decision.

Mr. Yeo: When the inspector has completed his report and when my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Transport have considered it.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress achieved with the European Community programme preventative environmental protection approaches in Europe since 1990.

Mr. Baldry: I will write to the hon. Member.

Global Warming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the research programme of the International Council of Scientific Unions on global warming and climate change.

Mr. Baldry: The scientific staff of the global atmosphere division of the Department of the Environment already have a set of reports from the International Council of Scientific Unions published as "The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme: a Study of Global Change", and another set is on order for the department's library.

West end Scheme, Bradford

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether any city grant has been approved for 3Ds Ltd., for the west end scheme in Bradford; whether all the published criteria have been met for the application; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether any second application for city grant has been made or is pending from 3Ds Ltd. for any further extension of the west end scheme in Bradford.

Mr. Key: No city grant has yet been approved. The first phase of the development is still under discussion with 3D Ltd., and further details have been requested from it prior to proceeding to full appraisal. No details are available about further applications arising from this current proposal.

UN Environment Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any British civil servants have been seconded to work at the secretariat of the United Nations conference on environment and development Rio 92 office in Conches, Switzerland.

Mr. Baldry: In January my Department seconded an official to the United Nations conference on environment and development secretariat and he has been appointed senior programme officer. We are also supporting a British United Nations volunteer who will be working for the secretariat later this year.

Ministers' Cars

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether particular cars or cars from a pool are allocated to Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to provide information about the use by Ministers of Government car service vehicles.

Planning Permission

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend article 18 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 so as to require local planning authorities to consult the National Rivers Authority on the availability of adequate water resources before granting planning permission for any development that is assessed as being likely to lead to a significant increase in water consumption in the area concerned.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so, but he keeps the General Development Order under constant review and pays close attention to any comments or proposals which the National Rivers Authority may make to him.

In addition to the existing statutory consultation requirements in article 18 of the General Development Order, the National Rivers Authority is already a consultee under the environmental assessment regulations. Local planning authorities also consult the National Rivers Authority on a non-statutory basis in preparing development plans and about planning applications which have implications for flood defence and land drainage; the Department's circular 17/82, which deals with these matters, is under review.

Local Government (Standing Orders)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his conclusions as a result of the consultation exercise on the implementation of sections 8 and 20 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Portillo: My Department and the Welsh Office have very carefully considered the comments received on the report produced by the joint local/central government working group on the implementation of sections 8 and 20 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which provides powers for the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales to require local authorities to adopt standing orders regulating the appointment and discipline of staff and various procedural matters. The Government have decided to implement only standing orders which will serve to underpin the independence of local authority chief officers. The consideration of any further action must await the conclusions of the general review of local government.

My Department will, therefore, be consulting the English and Welsh local authority associations on the content of draft regulations and the timing of their implementation, which would provide for compulsory standing orders on the appointment and dismissal of chief officers.

The proposals would require procedural safeguards on appointment, including a certificate from the monitoring officer, appointed under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and discipline, including the introduction of an independent person to ensure that unreasonable disciplinary action is not taken. These measures are essential to enable chief officers to continue to serve local authorities with maximum effectiveness.

On the procedural questions which were proposed to be covered by the compulsory standing orders we have also concluded that, in present circumstances, we should not impose new rules. The local authority associations will however also be consulted on a number of minor matters concerning procedural standing orders with a view to addressing certain ambiguities in the existing legislation on council procedures.

Wath Recycling

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information has been reported to him of the results of visits paid to the premises of Wath Recycling by officials of the South Yorkshire hazardous waste unit since June 1989.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* I have received regular progress reports about the Department's liaison with the South Yorkshire hazardous waste unit over that unit's monitoring of the site and about various options for dealing with the waste. But this has not required detailed reports on specific visits by the unit which has the regulatory responsibility.

Drinking Water (Lead Levels)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the lead levels in drinking water supplied by each undertaking in the Northumbrian Water Authority area; what action is being taken to reduce lead levels in drinking water in the Northumbrian Water Authority area; and how many tests on lead levels in drinking water of the Northumbrian Water Authority area have been made and how many are proposed to be made in 1991-92.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The public registers kept by all water companies contain details of lead levels in drinking water and the number of samples taken. The number of samples to be taken is set by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 and depends on the results of previous analysis of samples, and either the volume of water distributed for domestic purposes in a water supply zone or the population supplied in the zone. All water companies in England and Wales are carrying out surveys to establish whether there is a risk that lead levels in drinking water will exceed the standard set in the regulations of 50 micrograms per litre after it has left the company's pipes. The surveys should be completed in June and companies will then decide what measures, if any, they need to take.

Unleaded Petrol

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the report on his Department's survey into motorists' attitudes to the use of unleaded petrol will become available.

Mr. Baldry: The report, entitled "Survey of barriers against further uptake of unleaded petrol", was published today and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The findings of the report are being considered by my Department.

SCOTLAND

AIDS

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's financial assistance to voluntary bodies dealing with AIDS in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In respect of 1991-92 The Scottish Office has so far offered financial assistance to AIDS voluntary bodies in Scotland totalling approximately £108,000. Health boards may also provide assistance to such bodies in respect of services provided in their areas from their AIDS allocations, which total over £17 million in 1991-92.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the AIDS unit allocations made to each of the three host health boards in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices for 1990-91 and 1991-92, respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The following table shows, at cash prices, the allocations made in 1990-91 to Lothian, Greater Glasgow and Tayside health boards in respect of their AIDS units. It also shows these amounts adjusted to 1991-92 prices using the GDP deflator.

Allocations made in 1991-92 in respect of the revenue costs of the units have been subsumed in the general AIDS allocations made to the boards concerned. A capital allocation of £542,000 has been made to Lothian health board in 1991-92 in respect of its unit.

£ thousands

Health board	*Cash prices 1990-91*	*Adjusted to 1991-92 prices*
Lothian		
Capital	1,310	
Revenue	2,560	
	3,870	4,141
Greater Glasgow		
Capital	260	
Revenue	1,550	
	1,810	1,937
Tayside		
Capital	—	
Revenue	1,380	
	1,380	1,477

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the allocations for HIV-AIDS treatment care and prevention to each of the Scottish health boards in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices for 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 May 1991]:* The table shows AIDS allocations made to health boards in respect of 1990-91 and 1991-92 at cash prices and adjusted to 1991-92 prices using the GDP deflator.

A revised method has been applied for the allocation of AIDS resources in 1991-92. It is based mainly on the estimated care and treatment costs of people with HIV and AIDS in each health board area; but it also makes provision for expenditure on non-care and non-treatment activities (eg local HIV prevention initiatives); and it provides that the estimated revenue and, where appropriate, capital costs of the AIDS special units operated by Greater Glasgow, Lothian and Tayside health boards are met in full. It has the effect of directing the bulk of available resources to those health boards which are carrying the heaviest burdens arising from HIV and AIDS.

Health board	*Cash prices*	*Adjusted to 1991-92 prices*
	£ thousands	*£ thousands*
Argyll and Clyde		
1990-91	565	605
1991-92	503	503
Ayrshire and Arran		
1990-91	445	476
1991-92	424	424
Borders		
1990-91	131	140
1991-92	134	134
Dumfries and Galloway		
1990-91	216	231
1991-92	203	203
Fife		
1990-91	412	441
1991-92	418	418
Forth Valley		
1990-91	387	414
1991-92	402	402
Grampian		
1990-91	731	782
1991-92	598	598
Greater Glasgow		
1990-91[1]	3,757	4,020
1991-92	3,959	3,959
Highland		
1990-91	310	332
1991-92	262	262
Lanarkshire		
1990-91	657	703
1991-92	595	595
Lothian		
1990-91[1]	5,096	5,453
1991-92[1]	7,706	7,706
Orkney		
1990-91	24	26
1991-92	25	25
Shetland		
1990-91	28	30
1991-92	29	29
Tayside		
1990-91	2,101	2,248
1991-92	2,361	2,361
Western Isles		
1990-91	42	45
1991-92	42	42

[1] Includes capital provision in respect of AIDS unit.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department first learnt of the outbreak of Legionella resulting from contaminated water supplies in Greater Glasgow health board premises.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Legionellosis became a notifiable disease in Scotland on 1 October 1988. Since that date Greater Glasgow health board have informed the Scottish Office Home and Health Department on the occasion of any outbreak.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which hospitals have been affected by the Legionella outbreak in the Greater Glasgow area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During 1990 the Glasgow Royal Infirmary and the Glasgow Western Infirmary both recorded cases of Legionnaire's disease. There are currently no outbreaks in the Greater Glasgow health board area.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken to avoid further outbreaks of Legionella in Glasgow health board premises.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is an ongoing programme of water systems disinfection, maintenance and upgrading throughout Greater Glasgow health board's premises along with a programme of reserch into the proliferation of the legionellae becterium. Over the past two years £0·25 million has been spent on these measures and an allocation of £0·5 million has been made for 1991-92 to continue the programme.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many isolates of Legionella species have been found in the water supplies of Greater Glasgow health board premises.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 1 October 1988 Legionella pneumophila serogroups 1 and 6 have been isolated from the water systems in Greater Glasgow health board's premises.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when was the last case of water contaminated by Legionella species detected in the greater Glasgow area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Legionellaceae, the family of Legionella bacteria survive and multiply in water. It is widespread in natural fresh water including rivers and ponds, and may also be found in wet soil. There is a strong likelihood of very low concentrations of the bacterium existing in all open water systems, including hospital water systems, at almost any time.

In the main, through the control of water temperature, appropriate disinfection and avoidance of water stagnation, the proliferation of the bacterium can be satisfactorily contained.

Currently, there is no outbreak of legionnaire's disease in health board premises in the Greater Glasgow area.

Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial contribution he has made to the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education in each year since 1979, at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year	*Grant (at 1990-91 prices)* £
1979-80	18,075
1980-81	17,796
1981-82	25,494
1982-83	30,462
1983-84	36,519
1984-85	36,821
1985-86	37,568
1986-87	35,414
1987-88	33,621
1988-89	32,070
1989-90	30,148
1990-91	41,000
1991-92	39,253

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Forestry Commission will adopt a policy of offering sites of special scientific interest in its ownership which are considered for privatisation on a first refusal basis to nature conservation or heritage organisations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission has had such a policy since its programme of land sales began in 1981. Details of the arrangements followed are set out in appendix IX, paragraphs 15-17, of the Commission's 1989-90 annual report.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Forestry Commission's policy towards land which is designated as a site of special scientific interest.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It has long been the Forestry Commission's policy to agree plans with the Nature Conservancy Council and its successor bodies for the management of sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) on commission land and to consult with them over all grant-aid and felling applications affecting SSSIs on privately-owned land.

Nurses (Appeals)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses in *(a)* the Argyll and Clyde health board, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole had regrading appeals outstanding at 31 March.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* Information on the number of nurse clinical grading appeals outstanding at 31 March at health board level is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The information at Scottish appeals committee level and at negotiating council level is given in the following table.

	Scottish appeals committee	*Negotiating council*
Argyll and Clyde health board	148	17
Strathclyde[1]	684	43
Scotland	1,861	83

[1] Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire health boards and Glasgow and West of Scotland blood transfusion service.

Audiology

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what training programmes exist for physical measurement technicians in audiology; how many places are annually available; what budget is provided for the training currently and for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[Holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The training of physiological measurement technicians in audiology involves mainly in-service training, with further education colleges providing the necessary external input. The trainees are salaried. Information on individual health boards' training programmes, and their current and previous budgets since 1979 is not held centrally.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the average waiting list for *(a)* children under 16 years, *(b)* adults and *(c)* pensioners to obtain hearing assessments; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the average waiting time for the supply of hearing aids to *(a)* children under 16 years, *(b)* adults and *(c)* pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[Holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

DEFENCE

Polaris

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will obtain a copy of the report published by Greenpeace entitled "Bring Polaris Home" for his Department's library;

(2) if he will make a statement on his response to the report by Greenpeace entitled "Bring Polaris Home", a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has received a number of copies of the report by Greenpeace entitled "Bring Polaris Home", one of which has been passed to the Department's library. Our resolution class Polaris submarines, like all our other nuclear-powered submarines, have been subject to a programme of inspections, set in hand as a prudent precautionary measure following the discovery of a technical defect in one of the Royal Navy's hunter-killer submarines. As I have indicated to the House before—*Official Report*, 8 February 1991, columns *264-65*, our nuclear submarines operate, and are maintained, in accordance with rigorous safety standards and with the endorsement of the nuclear-powered warships safety committee. The Ministry of Defence attaches the greatest importance to nuclear safety and we would not allow any submarine to go to sea if we considered it unsafe to do so. Our intention remains to keep resolution class submarines in operation until they are replaced by the Vanguard class Trident force.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the repair and maintenance programme for Polaris nuclear submarines; and whether work is proceeding on developing remedial work on the nuclear reactors which will avoid radiation dosages to workers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Details of the repair and maintenance programme for Polaris nuclear submarines are classified. Radiation exposures are authorised only to the extent that they are justified, that they are within departmental and statutory limits, and that they are as low as reasonably practicable. They are kept under continuous review.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to ensure that radiation exposure of personnel undertaking nuclear safety inspections and repairs to operational Resolution class submarines at the Clyde submarine base have been as low as is reasonably possible.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All practicable measures are being taken to ensure that occupational exposure to ionising radiation throughout the Ministry of Defence, including Clyde submarine base, is as low as reasonably practicable. In the case of those so exposed as a result of tasks being carried out on nuclear submarines, such measures may include decontamination, shielding, work sharing and modification to procedures, as appropriate and depending upon the particular tasks involved.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many additional personnel have been employed to carry out nuclear safety inspections and repairs to operational Resolution class submarines over the last 18 months;

(2) what has been the cost of repairs to operational Resolution class submarines over the last 18 months;

(3) what has been the cost of nuclear safety inspections to operational Resolution class submarines over the last 18 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on details of submarine refit, repair or maintenance programmes.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 May, *Official Report*, column 256, if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the higher figures for the Clyde submarine base, as set out in his letter to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The increase in radiation dose figures for the Clyde submarine base for 1990 over those for previous years is due to a fluctuation in the workload. Although levels of individual dose are higher, all doses are within the statutory limits.

Air Crash, Cardigan Bay

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of the incident involving a pilotless aircraft which crashed on land near his Department's range on Cardigan bay at about 1800 hours on 14 May; whether his Department has launched an inquiry into the cause of the incident; and if he will publish its results.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A Jindivik unmanned aircraft crashed on its approach to the Defence Research Agency's Llanbedr airfield following a routine operational sortie. Debris resulting from the crash hit a car occupied by two people, one of whom sustained superficial injuries. A local board of inquiry has been set up by the aerospace division of the Defence Research Agency, the results of which will be published in the form of a military aircraft accident summary in due course.

RAF Training

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what differences exist between the first stage of training for a Royal Air Force fast jet pilot and the first stage of training for a civil pilot.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no single, standard route for training for either civil or RAF fast jet pilots. However, a typical civil trainee may expect to be awarded his commercial pilot's licence after approximately 170 to 200 hours of flying training, normally on a light piston engined aircraft. An RAF fast jet trainee will carry out around 147 hours of basic flying training on the Tucano before going on to the Hawk. During this training, both will have carried out general flying, including circuit work, stalling, instrument flying and navigation. However, the civil training will have concentrated on instrument flying and navigation in airways, whereas the RAF pilot, although carrying out some airways training, will have concentrated on low-level navigation. It would also be very rare for a civil trainee to do aerobatics or formation flying, whereas these disciplines form very major elements of RAF training.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will provide a declassified summary of the programme of training for *(a)* fast jet pilots, *(b)* helicopter pilots and *(c)* transport aircraft pilots.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Due to the different flying backgrounds of personnel entering the RAF for training, it is not possible to give a single definitive programme. Some pilot recruits will have no previous flying experience whereas some may have received flying training at one of the university air squadrons, or may have considerable previous civilian experience, including commercial licences. Their training pattern will depend to some extent on this previous experience. For an entrant holding a private pilot's licence, his training up to the award of wings, and following completion of initial officer training, for the three specialisations mentioned would typically be:

a. Fast jet
147 hours on the Tucano, taking 46 weeks.
75 hours on the Hawk, taking 22 weeks.

b. Helicopter
64 hours on the Tucano, taking 26 weeks.
80 hours on the Gazelle, taking 18 weeks.
63 hours on the Wessex, taking 14 weeks.

c. Multi-engine
140 hours on the Tucano, taking 40 weeks.
50 hours on the Jetstream, taking 20 weeks.

After award of wings, pilots will go on to complete specialised training for the specific type of aircraft they will fly operationally, which in the longest case will be a further 40 weeks. During the whole of this period, their flying training will be integrated with ground instruction in specialist and general service training.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to place orders for Type 23 frigates.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have nothing to add to my answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *192*.

Missiles

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards Dutch participation in the local area missile system study.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No aproach has been received from the Netherlands about joining the local area missile system study. Any approach would require discussion among the collaborative partners in the family of anti-air missile systems programme, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the successful bidder in the advanced short-range air-to-air missile contract.

Mr. Alan Clark: I hope to be in a position to make an announcement next year.

Over-the-Horizon Radar

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the considerations which influenced the cancellation of the plans to base relocatable over-the-horizon radar transmitters at St. David's airfield and at Blakehill.

Mr. Alan Clark: The decision was taken in the light of competing calls on the defence budget and various representations made to me over the last 12 months.

Airborne Stand-off Radar

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the results of the airborne stand-off radar demonstration programme; and what factors he will take into account in deciding whether the programme will be further developed.

Mr. Alan Clark: The results of the technology demonstrator programme will be considered towards the end of this year. Decisions on the future of the programme will take account of all relevant factors including the results of the demonstrator programme, operational requirements and affordability.

Hunt Class Minehunters

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the updating of Hunt class minehunters will commence; what improvements will be made; when the updating is expected to be concluded; and what effect there will be on the capability of the vessels.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Hunt class minehunters are modern and capable ships. The most recent of the class, HMS Quorn, entered service in 1989. We are considering whether, as with other ships, they should eventually be updated as technology develops. No decisions are required for some time.

The Gulf

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission a study into the contribution made to successful United Kingdom operations in the Gulf war by logistical support.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All aspects of the Gulf conflict are currently being considered.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards Anglo-French co-operation in the development of a new generation SSN.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No decisions have yet been made concerning a new generation SSN for the Royal Navy. The scope for Anglo-French co-operation will continue to be kept under review.

Search and Rescue Services

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the terms of the unsolicited offer received by his Department for the contractorisation of part of the search and rescue services presently provided by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. This information is commercially confidential.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to have completed consideration of the unsolicited offer received by his Department for the contractorisation of parts of the search and rescue operations presently provided by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The provision of military search and rescue cover around the United Kingdom is being reviewed as part of the MOD's work on the "Options for Change" proposals. It will not be possible to consider the potential for contractorisation until the outcome of this work is clearer.

Coastal Patrol Boats

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fast coastal patrol boats are in service with the Royal Navy; and when he expects to place orders for additional vessels.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Royal Navy does not operate a type of craft known as a "fast coastal patrol boat". It does, however, have a number of patrol craft, among them the Peacock class Hong Kong patrol craft, Bird class large patrol craft, the Attacker and Archer class training craft. There are no current plans to place orders for patrol craft.

British Marines, Turkey

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey concerning members of the British Marines, following a dispute with a Turkish provincial governor at a refugee camp in Yesilova, Turkey.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is regular contact with the Government of Turkey on all aspects of the coalition humanitarian operation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited Turkey last week and met President Ozal for discussions on mutual co-operation.

Occasional misunderstandings between the different forces and authorities involved in the operation, such as the minor incident at Yelisova, are almost inevitable in the difficult circumstances of the refugee camps, but relations between British and Turkish forces and officials on the ground have been and remain good.

HEALTH

NHS Low Income Scheme

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the responsibility for the NHS low income scheme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since 10 April 1991, responsibility for the national health service low income scheme has been consolidated within the Department of Health. Claims for charge remission will continue to be dealt with by the health benefits unit—previously the agency benefits unit—at Newcastle but with the unit working directly to the Department of Health on the basis of a service agreement.

During 1991, the Department of Health will undertake a review of the administration of the low income scheme. The review will aim to produce proposals by the end of 1991 for simplifying the claim form AG1 and other administrative procedures.

Thalidomide

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the pharmaceutical drug Thalidomide still has a product licence; for what purposes its use is recommended; and what safeguards there are to ensure that it is not taken by pregnant women;

(2) if any drug trials are currently taking place involving the pharmaceutical drug Thalidomide.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Thre are no current product licences for Thalidomide in the United Kingdom.

The medicines control agency of the Department of Health has been notified under the doctors and dentists exemption scheme of one clinical trial involving the use of the drug Thalidomide in the United Kingdom.

Clinical trials with Thalidomide may be approved which do not involve women of child-bearing potential. There is interest in testing it for use in severe orogenital ulceration—Behcet's syndrome—and serious skin conditions—actinic prurigo and skin disease of leprosy.

General Practitioners

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the projects in Yorkshire and Trent regions studying the extension of general practitioner fundholding to the community care services; when he expects the project to be complete; and what other extensions of the general practitioner fundholding concept are under consideration.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Yorkshire project is exploring the benefits to patients of co-locating health and social care services in a fundholding practice. The Trent project will consider the options for including within the general practice funding scheme community health services, some aspects of social care and other hospital services. The second year of this project will pilot some of the options developed in the first year.

Both projects are expected to be complete in spring 1993. We are also piloting the extension of the fundholding scheme to practices with a list size of less than 9,000 patients.

Health Spending

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the level of expenditure on *(a)* the national health service and *(b)* the hospital and community health services current budget, for each year since 1973-74, expressed in 1990-91 prices, adjusted by *(a)* the gross domestic product deflator and *(b)* changes in input unit costs;

(2) what was the level of net hospital and community health services current and net NHS expenditure adjusted by changes in input unit costs in each year since 1973-74.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The information requested is given in the table.

	NHS expenditure (gross)		*HCHS expenditure (gross)*			
Year	*Adjusted by the GDP 1990-91 prices*	*Adjusted for input unit costs 1990-91 prices*	*Adjusted by the GDP 1990-91 prices*		*Adjusted for input unit costs 1990-91 prices*	
			A	*B*	*A*	*B*
1973-74	14,074	—	—	8,992	—	—
1974-75	15,526	18,045	—	10,663	—	12,594
1975-76	16,285	18,447	—	11,126	—	12,807
1976-77	16,373	18,617	—	11,187	—	12,846
1977-78	15,912	18,889	—	11,009	—	13,235
1978-79	16,460	19,606	—	11,407	—	13,873
1979-80	16,766	19,418	—	11,644	—	13,736
1980-81	18,459	19,699	—	12,966	—	14,116
1981-82	18,875	20,635	—	13,054	—	14,403
1982-83	19,217	21,107	—	13,128	—	14,567
1983-84	19,550	21,361	—	13,207	—	14,587
1984-85	19,955	21,650	—	13,282	—	14,570
1985-86	20,029	21,778	13,592	13,274	14,943	14,594
1986-87	20,826	22,041	14,125	—	15,031	—
1987-88	21,741	22,462	14,816	—	15,306	—
1988-89	22,464	22,671	15,294	—	15,363	—
1989-90	22,747	22,821	15,414	—	15,378	—
1990-91	23,751	23,751	16,114	—	16,114	—

	NHS expenditure (net)		*HCHS current (net)*			
Year	*Adjusted by the GDP 1990-91 prices*	*Adjusted for input unit costs 1990-91 prices*	*Adjusted by the GDP 1990-91 prices*		*Adjusted for input unit costs 1990-91 prices*	
			A	*B*	*A*	*B*
1973-74	13,603	—	—	8,889	—	—
1974-75	15,123	17,577	—	10,568	—	12,482
1975-76	15,932	18,047	—	11,040	—	12,708
1976-77	16,001	18,194	—	11,091	—	12,737
1977-78	15,537	18,444	—	10,914	—	13,120
1978-79	15,824	18,849	—	11,064	—	13,456
1979-80	16,100	18,647	—	11,324	—	13,336
1980-81	17,722	19,170	—	12,623	—	13,742
1981-82	18,084	19,770	—	12,701	—	14,014
1982-83	18,386	20,195	—	12,773	—	14,173
1983-84	18,578	20,351	—	12,829	—	14,170
1984-85	18,972	20,583	—	12,905	—	14,157
1985-86	19,027	20,688	13,200	12,898	14,512	14,180
1986-87	19,694	20,843	13,715	—	14,594	—
1987-88	20,526	21,206	14,397	—	14,872	—
1988-89	21,098	21,292	14,860	—	14,927	—
1989-90	21,389	21,459	14,955	—	14,920	—
1990-91	22,403	22,403	15,629	—	15,629	—

Note: Figures in column A have been adjusted to reflect the transfer of the Family Health Service Administration, Disablement Services Authority and the Family Health Services cash-limited spending to the HCHS (and also take account of changes since publication of the Departmental Report, CM 1513). Figures in column B do not reflect these transfers and are therefore not comparable with those for later years.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Payment Delays

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the delay in the processing of claims relating to disability benefit payments and backdated reduced earnings allowance, made by citizens resident in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow; and what are the reasons for the differences in the levels of payments that have been made to such people in different areas.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Low Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report*, columns *467-68*, if he will now provide similar information regarding those living on incomes less than 50 per cent. of the national average in each of the same years.

Mr. Jack: Information in precisely the form requested is available only for the years for which "Households Below Average Income"—HBAI—has been published. Other information is available for earlier years, but the methodologies and definitions used differ substantially and it is therefore not appropriate to make direct comparisons throughout the whole period.

It is also important to remember that real personal disposable income per head in the United Kingdom has risen substantially during this period. Consequently, the percentage of the population who were living on incomes below any constant threshold will show a very different picture. Thus, for example, the numbers of people living below 50 per cent. of the 1979 national average equivalised income—before housing costs—fell from 3·8 million in 1979 to 2·5 million in 1987 and remained at 2·5 million in 1988.

Sources are the Central Statistical Office's annual redistribution of income articles and the published family expenditure survey reports; the estimates listed in the table are made from the most appropriate published source for each year. All the pre-HBAI analyses are in terms of numbers of households rather than population, and none of them used equivalisation to adjust for differing household sizes and compositions. This makes a considerable difference to the percentage shown as having below half average income. The pre-HBAI household income distributions show many households with relatively low incomes merely because there are few people —perhaps only one person—living in these households. The HBAI figures in the first column use equivalisation to adjust for this, and thus give a meaningful indication of the income distribution and of relative living standards.

Various different definitions of income have been used, and the one from the FES reports in 1960-61 and 1965-66 is a pre-tax gross income measure.

All the figures are derived from the family expenditure survey and thus cover only the household population.

Source:	*HBAI*	*RoI*	*RoI*	*FES Report*
Income:	*Equivalised*	*Household*	*Household*	*Household*
Measure:	*Household disposable*	*Disposable*	*Final*	*Gross*
Unit analysed:	*Persons*	*Household*	*Household*	*Household*
Coverage:	*Great Britain*	*United Kingdom*	*United Kingdom*	*United Kingdom*
	Percentage with less than 50 per cent. mean income			
1988	[1]16·8	—	—	—
1987	14·3	—	—	—
1985	9·2	25	—	—
1980	[2]7·7	23	—	—
1975	—	22	20	—
1970	—	—	21	23
1965-66	—	—	—	20
1960-61	—	—	—	20

[1]Source: Select Committee HBAI
[2] Average of figures for 1979 and 1981

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each means-tested benefit, each of those other benefits which are taken into account in assessing its value.

Mr. Jack: There are four income-related benefits. These are income support, family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit. The treatment of these benefits in assessing entitlement to each of the others is set out in the table.

Benefit being assessed	*Benefits to be taken into account*			
	Income support	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Community Charge benefit*
Income support	—	Yes	No	No
Family credit	No	—	No	No
Housing benefit	No	Yes	—	No
Community charge benefit	No	Yes	No	—

Generally attendance allowance—other than for those in residential care or nursing homes—and mobility allowance are fully disregarded in all the income related benefits, as is the first £10 of war widows pension, war disablement pension and other analogous payments. Child benefit, including one-parent benefit, is disregarded in the assessment of family credit. Most other social security benefits are taken fully into account in calculating entitlement to the income-related benefits.

Full lists of items which are disregarded in whole or in part are contained in regulation 40(2) of, and schedule 9 to, the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987; regulation 24(2) of, and schedule 2 to the Family Credit (General) Regulations 1987; 29(2), 31(2), 33(2), 36(3) and 38(2) of, and schedules 3, 4 and 5 to, the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 and regulations 23(2) of, and schedule 3 to, the Community Charge Benefits (General) Regulations 1989.

Family credit is paid at the same rate for a fixed period of 26 weeks. If a claim for income support is made within

this period, family credit is taken into account in the calculation of the income support for the remainder of the 26-week period.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The Department has no separate public relations section. Functions commonly associated with public relations are carried out by information officers as part of their duties in the Department's information division.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies, given to him on 19 November 1986 at column *794*, on 4 November 1987 at columns *785-87*, on 14 January 1988 at column *402*, on 13 March 1989 at columns *30-31*, for information for 1979-80 to 1989-90.

Estimated total expenditure by the information division in 1990-91 is as follows:

	£ million
Publicity	12·843
Staff	1·354
Running costs	0·603

The 1991-92 budgets for the information division in the Department of Social Security headquarters and the Benefits Agency are as follows.

£ million

	DSS HQ	*Benefits agency*
Publicity	12·992	8·70
Staff	0·658	0·54
Running costs	0·550	0·05

Care Homes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the maximum rates of benefit for each category of residential care and nursing home in April 1987 and 1991, both in cash and real terms.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 8 May 1991]:* The table shows the national limits for April 1987 and 1991 in cash and real terms, using April 1991 as the base and applying movements in the retail prices index to convert the April 1987 limit into 1991 terms. The comparison should be treated with caution because the RPI is only a measure of price movements generally.

	April 1987 (cash) £	*April 1987 (real)* £	*April 1991 (cash and real)* £
Residential care homes			
Elderly	130	170	160
Very dependent elderly	145	190	185
Mentally ill	130	170	170
Drug/alcohol dependent	130	170	170
Mentally handicapped	150	196	195
Physically disabled under pension age	190	248	230
Others	130	170	160
Nursing Homes			
Elderly and others	175	229	255
Mentally ill	180	235	255
Drug/alcohol dependent	180	235	255
Mentally handicapped	200	261	260
Physically disabled under pension age	230	301	290
Terminally ill	230	301	275
Greater London Extension			
Residential care homes	17·5	23	23
Nursing homes	17·5	23	33

Claimants, Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many tenants in Blyth Valley are in receipt of rent rebates and poll tax rebates.

Mr. Scott: At February 1991, the latest date for which information is available, the housing benefit caseload in the Blyth Valley borough council area was 6,994. Of this total, 5,358 households were in receipt of a rent rebate and 1,636 households were in receipt of a rent allowance. At the same date, approximately 18,000 individuals, including tenants, were in receipt of community charge benefit.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will outline the duties and responsibilities of the Under-Secretaries of State in his Department following the creation of the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The duties and responsibilities of Under-Secretaries of State are contained in the list of ministerial responsibilities, a copy of which is available in the Library. Ministers remain fully accountable to Parliament for the work of the Department, including its executive agencies.

Family Support

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes are intended in support for less well-off families in 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last October, child benefit rose by £1 a week for the eldest eligible child in each family this April. In addition, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer anounced in his Budget statement, child benefit will rise by a further £1 a week for the eldest eligible child in each family in October, with an extra 25p a week for other children. The Government are taking all steps necessary to make sure that families at all income levels will gain from the October increase.

The income support personal allowances for single people under 25 who claim independently will also be increased in line with the children's rates.

These October increases will be in addition to the April uprating of all the income-related benefits.

As my right hon. Friend said in his Budget statement, the Government are committed to increasing the new rates of child benefit in line with the movement in the retail price index each year, starting in April 1992. We will announce in the uprating statement the allocation of the individual amounts between the eldest eligible child and other children.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 May 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Howbury Grange School

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the future of Howbury Grange school.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has received two letters, both objecting to the proposed closure of Howbury Grange school.

School Premises Regulations

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981; and when he expects to publish the results of the review.

Mr. Fallon: Work is currently in progress on a range of topics as part of the review, the results of which are likely to be available towards the end of next year.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what upper limit he will place on the proportion of schools eligible to achieve grant-maintained status, provided each school complies with his current criteria.

Mr. Eggar: None. All maintained primary and secondary schools are eligible to apply for grant-maintained status. We will judge each application which comes before us on its individual merits.

Edinburgh University

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a direct grant to the university of Edinburgh on condition that the Audobon bird manuscripts and editions are retained in perpetuity.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No. Universities are responsible for managing their own financial affairs, including the acquisition and disposal of assets.

Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish the results of his review of Government policy on sport.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 30 November 1990 at columns *501-2*, when I said that we aim to publish a statement of the Government's policies and priorities for sport in the summer.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Budget

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing for each of the past 25 years, the proportion of gross national product which the United Kingdom has given by way of overseas aid.

Mrs. Chalker: Net official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product was as follows:

	Per cent.
1965	0·46
1966	0·45
1967	0·43
1968	0·39
1969	0·38
1970	0·36
1971	0·40
1972	0·37
1973	0·33
1974	0·36
1975	0·38
1976	0·39
1977	0·44
1978	0·45
1979	0·51
1980	0·34
1981	0·42
1982	0·37
1983	0·35
1984	0·33
1985	0·33
1986	0·31
1987	0·28
1988	0·32
1989	0·31

The figure for 1990 will be available in June.

Kurds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state what is the total value of the aid given by Her Majesty's Government to help the Kurds since the ending of the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Since 4 April, British humanitarian assistance for Iraqi refugees, including our share of the EC emergency programme, totals £61·5 million.

Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the principles governing the management of Britain's own forests are applied to the management of forests overseas as criteria for determining eligibility of aid for specific projects.

Mrs. Chalker: The technical, environmental, social and economic issues involved in the management of tropical forests often differ from those involved in the management of British forests. In financing projects and programmes in developing countries in the forest sector, the ODA uses appraisal, design and management principles which it considers appropriate to issues involved. In doing so, the ODA draws on the expertise of its forestry advisers and, as appropriate, other expertise both in the United Kingdom and overseas.

ENVIRONMENT

London Docklands

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the residential units completed in the London Docklands UDA since 1981 have been *(a)* built for sale, *(b)* built for rent by local authorities, *(c)* built for rent by housing associations and *(d)* built for other types of tenure; if he will specify them; and if he will provide similar figures for those residential units that have been built on London Docklands development corporation-owned land since 1981.

Mr. Key: Nearly a fifth of all new housing in the UDA is social housing of one sort or another, as shown in the table below.

	Total in UDA	*On LDDC land*
(a) For sale	12,247	6,498
(b) Local authority rented	804	209
(c) Housing association rented	1,471	985
(d) Other—shared ownership	560	538
—self build	138	137
Total	15,220	8,367

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for each year since 1981, the total expenditure by the London Docklands development corporation on *(a)* the provision of the new units of social housing and *(b)* housing improvements or refurbishment.

Mr. Key *[pursuant to his answer, 8 May 1991, Official Report, c. 519]:* The information is provided in the tables:

(a) New social housing units

	£ million
1981-82	0·0
1982-83	0·0
1983-84	3·3
1984-85	0·0
1985-86	0·0
1986-87	0·0
1987-88	0·0
1988-89	50·5
1989-90	43·7
1990-91	27·0
Total	[1]124·5

(b) Housing improvement or refurbishment

	£ million
1981-82	0·0
1982-83	0·4
1983-84	0·4
1984-85	0·0
1985-86	0·2
1986-87	1·7
1987-88	2·3
1988-89	6·8
1989-90	1·4
1990-91	8·5
Total	21·7

[1]Not including contributions made in form of land sold at social housing use values.

Housing (Government Subsidies)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Great Grimsby, Barrow in Furness, Wandsworth, Westminster and Elmbridge his estimate of (i) the average Government subsidy per council dwelling and (ii) the average amount of mortgage interest tax relief for other dwellings.

Mr. Yeo: The information is as follows:

Average amount of housing revenue account subsidy claimed per dwelling for 1991-92

	£
Great Grimsby	897
Barrow in Furness	870
Wandsworth	1,518
Westminster	2,124
Elmbridge	769

The estimated average cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1990-91 for each owner occupier claiming mortgage tax relief in the United Kingdom was £830, equivalent to £531 for all owner occupiers. Information on the average amount mortgage tax relief claimed broken down by local authority area is not available.

The capital cost of constructing council dwellings in 1990-91 was approximately £44,000 per dwelling in the north and £55,000 in the south-east and eastern regions, excluding the land cost element.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the value of the housing stock in England; and what effect a reduction in that figure to £1,200 billion would have on the council tax revenue yield overall and from households in each band.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 10 May at column *622*.

The illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April were based on a yield of £6·8 billion. This would not have been different if the assumed value of the housing stock had been lower.

Population Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the population, total number of households, the total number of pensioners and children.

Mr. Key: Estimates of the population by broad age ranges for each local authority district are given in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication, "Key population and vital statistics, local and health authority areas". A copy of the latest edition giving 1989 estimates can be found in the House of Commons Library and further assistance may be obtained from the Library's statistical staff.

Regarding information on households I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave him on 21 May 1991 at column *402*, and on 20 May at columns *327-28*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing nationally, regionally and for each district, the number of two-adult households with three or more children.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 21 May 1991 at column *402*.

Air Pollution Monitoring

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the air pollution monitoring sites based in south Yorkshire for *(a)* ozone, *(b)* carbon monoxide, *(c)* nitrogen oxides, *(d)* acid deposition, *(e)* atmospheric chemistry, *(f)* atmospheric hydrocarbon, *(g)* trace germs, *(h)* smoke and sulphur dioxide directive, *(i)* other sulphur dioxide sites, *(j)* lead sites and *(k)* multi-element sites including lead.

Mr. Baldry: My Department is currently operating the following air pollution monitoring sites in south Yorkshire:

(a) ozone, none
(b) carbon monoxide, none
(c) nitrogen oxides, none
(d) acid deposition, none
(e) atmospheric chemistry, none
(f) atmospheric hydrocarbons, none
(g) trace gases, none
(h) smoke and sulphur dioxide directive,
Askern 6
Barnsley 8, 9, 12
Brampton 1
Cudworth 1
Dinnington 4
Doncaster 29, 33
Goldthorpe 1
Grimethorpe 2, 3
Hoyland Nether, 6
Lundwood 1
Maltby 2
Mexborough 19
Moorends 1
Rossington 1
Sheffield 40, 82
Stainforth 1
Swinton 7
Thorne 2
Wath-upon-Dearne 6
Wombwell 2
Worsbrough Bridge 2
(i) other sulphur dioxide sites, Barnsley
(j) lead sites, Sandbeck Hall
(k) multi-element sites including lead, Sandbeck Hall

Local Government Review

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use he plans to make of the university of Aston business school's report on the national survey of parish and town councils in his current review of local government.

Mr. Key: We shall take into account the results of the national survey of parish and town councils by the university of Aston business school in our local government review.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is yet able to give a definite date for when he expects to receive the university of Aston business school's report on the national survey of parish and town councils; what monetary assistance was given to the clerks to the councils for compiling this information; and what action he will be carrying out after studying the report.

Mr. Key: We expect to receive the first results of this survey shortly. The clerks to the councils completed the survey without financial assistance from the Department, in accordance with the usual research practice. The results will be taken into account in our local government review and will inform the Department's work in relation to parishes.

Thamesmead

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Boundary Commission to report to him on Thamesmead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Local Government Boundary Commission's programme of work is for the commission to determine with the resources at its disposal. I understand that the commission is currently considering the responses it has received to its draft proposals for the boundary between the London boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich, affecting Thamesmead, and it is likely to be some time before this review is completed. I regret that I cannot give a firmer forecast.

Yorkshire Water

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what target has been set for Yorkshire Water plc to achieve in terms of reducing water loss between reservoir and consumer as part of the efficiency component in price setting.

Mr. Baldry: The K factors set for Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. to run for 10 years from 1990 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State assumed that there would be continuing efficiency gains across the full operations of the company. No specific target was set within price setting for reducing water loss. Questions on the continuing performance of Yorkshire Water should be addressed to the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports have been made by Yorkshire Water plc on progress made in reducing the proportion of water lost between reservoir and consumer since privatisation.

Mr. Baldry: I am informed that Yorkshire Water plc has not published any reports on this topic. However, Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. (YWS) has a continuing programme to reduce leakage, which is monitored by the Director General of Water Services. YWS outlined its programme to the Yorkshire Customer Service Committee in July 1990.

Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the first meeting of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment will take place; and what will be on the agenda.

Mr. Baldry: The Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment held its first meeting on 21 May. The committee discussed a wide range of current and longer-term environmental issues.

Benzene

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the levels of airborne benzene in south Yorkshire.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has no information on the levels of airborne benzene specifically in south Yorkshire.

Chelmsford Borough Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement listing the amount of public money his Department has passed to Chelmsford borough council for all services since April 1979; and what are his forward plans for the next three years.

Mr. Key: The amounts paid in support of Chelmsford borough council's general services for these years—excluding figures for main housing subsidy for 1979-80 and 1980-81 which could be provided only at disproportionate cost—were:

	Rate support grant (£000)	*Main housing subsidy (£000)*
1979-80	6,147	—
1980-81	7,034	—
1981-82	3,044	590
1982-83	4,302	0
1983-84	4,367	0
1984-85	4,207	0
1985-86	3,771	0
1986-87	6,005	0
1987-88	4,064	0
1988-89	3,310	0
1989-90	3,219	0

The amounts paid to Chelmsford borough council in respect of 1990-91 were:

	1990-91 (£ thousands)
Revenue support grant	11,894
Non-domestic rates	23,966
Housing revenue account subsidy	3,934

The amounts which the Government propose to pay to the borough council in respect of 1991-92 are:

	£ thousands
Community charge grant	[1]15,925
Revenue support grant	16,629
National non-domestic rates	39,795
Housing revenue account subsidy	2,930

[1] Estimated.

These figures exclude information on minor specific grants paid in respect of particular functions or services.

It is not possible to give details of the amounts of external finance to be paid to the district council in 1992-93 and 1993-94 since this will depend on decisions which have yet to be taken on the amount and distribution of public expenditure in those years.

Waste Storage

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now issue new guidance to county councils in relation to the tipping and storage of waste into exhausted gravel pits and quarries.

Mr. Trippier: There is already extensive guidance. Guidance on using controlled wastes as landfill materials in the reclamation of surface mineral workings in general is contained in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 7, "The Reclamation of Mineral Workings" published in September 1989. Detailed advice on aspects of waste disposal is also given in my Department's series of waste management papers. No. 26 in this series, "Landfilling Wastes—a Technical Memorandum" was published in 1986; No. 4, "The Licensing of Waste Disposal Sites", which offers advice to local authorities responsible for waste disposal licensing, was revised in 1988.

My Department will continue to update guidance to take account of technical developments, the results of research and legislative changes. Work has begun on the revision of waste management paper No. 4 to reflect the changes to be introduced under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Under the Act, authorities will be obliged to have regard to guidance from the Secretary of State in exercising their licensing functions.

Aggregates

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now issue new guidance to county councils governing gravel extraction.

Sir George Young: The Government have recently announced their intention to prepare new guidance on the provision for aggregates in England and Wales to replace the current advice in MPG6. The publication of the new long-term forecasts of demand for aggregates on 7 May was the first step in this exercise. The Government will be considering any views which may be expressed about these forecasts, and have also asked the regional aggregates working parties for their views on how medium and long-term demand might be met. Draft guidance will be prepared in the light of these views and will be issued for public consultation in the usual way. It would be premature to issue any revised guidance until there has been a full and open debate about the guidance.

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Government's current initiatives and projects in response to the concern about the environmental consequences of meeting the national demand for aggregates.

Sir George Young: My Department has a comprehensive programme of research which is examining a variety of matters associated with the environmental consequences of the national demand for aggregates. The main initiatives and projects are as follows:

A. Current Studies

(i) study into the use of secondary and waste materials—including recycling—report due July 1991;

(ii) study into potential supplies of aggregates from coastal superquarries to supply the South-East—final report due August 1992;

(iii) study into potential supplies from marine sand and gravel off the Humber coast—interim report due September 1991;

(iv) study into the specifications of aggregates used in the construction industry—final report due July 1991;

(v) study into the overall environmental effects of surface mineral workings—report due July 1991;

(vi) study into the effectiveness of restoration conditions for minerals workings and the need for bonds—final report due;

(vii) study into amenity reclamation of mineral workings—final report due July 1991;

(viii) study into agricultural reclamation of mineral workings—report due July 1991;
(ix) study into limestone landform replication—final report due March 1993.

B. Work about to begin includes:
(i) a pilot study to begin in July to put into effect the recommendations made in the Groundwork report published in April on the environmental performance of the minerals industry;
(ii) a study on the environmental effects and control of dust from surface mineral workings;
(iii) a study on the environmental effects of traffic associated with surface mineral workings;
(iv) a study to identify the extent and quality of sand and gravel resources in England and Wales.

In addition to this, my Department will shortly be issuing draft guidance for public consultation on the control of noise at minerals sites which follows on from research completed in 1990.

Dog Registration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in support of the establishment of a national dog registration scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Out of 462 local authorities and those organisations known to represent them, 238 responded to our consultation paper, "Action on Dogs", which was issued in 1989. Two hundred and seven of those who responded supported a dog registration scheme. By last June, when the "Control of Dogs" consultation document was issued, of the 244 local authorities and their representative organisations who responded to part II of the paper for which we are responsible, only 135 supported registration.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Local Government Act 1988 to introduce a national dog registration scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: No. The Government intend to implement, from April 1992, the package of dog control measures contained in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. They include a duty on local authorities to enforce the requirement that dogs wear a collar and identification tag when in a public place and to ensure that stray dogs are collected up. We remain of the view that the package provides a practical and effective solution to the problems caused by irresponsible owners and that registration would be bureaucratic, expensive to operate and difficult to enforce. With regard to dogs which are bred especially for fighting, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced his intention to bring before the House as soon as possible this Session, legislation which will ban the breeding and ownership of such dogs.

Barratt Houses, Illingworth

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Halifax concerning the sale of Barratt houses at Abbey Park, Illingworth.

Mr. Key: I have written today to the hon. Lady about this matter.

Landfills

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require compulsory insurance against pollution leaks and contamination from landfills.

Mr. Baldry: Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, when it comes into force, will include a number of measures to ensure that pollution from landfills is prevented, or, if it occurs, that remedial action is taken. Under the Act, local authorities will impose pollution control conditions on licensees, who will be obliged to remedy any pollution from the site at their own expense. These conditions will remain binding even after closure for as long as the authority is not satisfied that the site is safe, and the licensee will not be permitted to surrender or transfer the licence without the consent of the authority.

As part of their vetting of licence applicants, authorities will be able to refuse an applicant who has not made or is in no position to make adequate financial provision to discharge the provisions of the licence. The form this financial provision should take will be the subject of guidance from the Secretary of State. A working group including representatives of industry and local authorities is examining the subject of long-term financial provision, including insurance, for waste sites and is expected to report this summer.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on companies' responses to the requirements of integrated pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Integrated pollution control, introduced by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, requires operators of prescribed processes to obtain an authorisation from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. To date, 125 applications for authorisations have been received and are being considered.

Environment Shows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will be making any contribution towards or have any presence at *(a)* the environmental business show at Alexandra Palace, London on 4 to 6 June or *(b)* the green show, at the national exhibition centre, Birmingham on 21 to 27 May.

Mr. Trippier: I have accepted an invitation to visit the green show on 23 May. The Department does not plan to participate in the show at Alexandra Palace.

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any ministerial car on official duty since 1979 has *(a)* been stopped by the police for breaking the speed limit and *(b)* been parked illegally resulting in the driver being issued with a parking ticket.

Mr. Yeo: Yes, to both parts of the question.

Sewerage

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require the water and sewerage companies of England and Wales to adopt sewerage systems irrespective of their condition.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Community Charge

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities for costs incurred in connection with the community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Key *[pursuant to his answer, 18 March 1991, Official Report, c. 37]*: The improvements to the community charge reduction scheme which we were able to make following the Budget will clearly impact on local authorities' preparation and administration costs. We are therefore proposing to make more grant available to ensure that authorities are reimbursed in full for all reasonable costs associated with operating the scheme. We also propose to simplify the arrangements for distributing the grant in order to ensure that local authorities receive payment as quickly as possible.

Local authorities will no longer be required to submit initial claims in respect of preparation costs or administration costs. Instead authorities will receive an initial payment of their preparation costs based on last year's claims. Any adjustments necessary at the end of the financial year will be made on receipt of audited claims. In addition, general administration costs for the life of the scheme will be wrapped up in a one-off payment of a flat rate per charge-payer. The amounts which previously had to be claimed for applications for extra relief or revised bills will be reflected in a higher rate.

On the basis of these proposals the cost of the community charge reduction scheme preparation and administration costs grant is expected to rise from £10 million to about £15 million.

Urban Programme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be available for local authorities under the urban programme in 1991-92 and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his answer, 29 January 1991, Official Report c. 474]*: The urban programme is one of many Government programmes which encourage local initiative in urban regeneration. Others include estate action and city grant in my Department, Task Forces in the Department of Trade and Industry and employment and training services supported by the Employment Department.

We now intend to enhance the effectiveness of our expenditure in urban areas in England. We will be bringing together programmes in selected neighbourhoods so as to tackle problems comprehensively and on a significant scale. A new initiative, "city challenge", will achieve this and improve the quality of our cities. Local authorities will be invited to enter into partnerships with their local businesses and their community to draw together imaginative programmes for the regeneration of their areas. I will support those authorities that create the most effective partnerships and prepare the best plans for the neighbourhoods that are critical to the health of their cities.

Under city challenge, I will invite authorities to draw up programmes of action to tackle their key neighbourhoods. I will expect the authorities, in the preparation of these programmes, to draw upon the wealth of talent and expertise which exists in their cities; local people and the voluntary sector, the business and academic communities, the training and enterprise councils, and Government and other statutory agencies. I will expect them to attract private finance and involve the private sector thoroughly in managing the programme. The programmes should each be for a fixed period, normally not more than five years, and must include key targets and deadlines.

I will be making available, from within my existing resources, £75 million in 1992-93 in order to pilot the approach in selected pacemaker authorities. The pacemakers will be chosen through competition. I am writing to the leaders of 15 authorities, listed below, asking them to come forward by 5 July with a bid to become a pacemaker. These authorities have been selected to include a variety of urban problems and opportunities. I then intend, in July, to make a selection of the 10 best proposals to be worked up into detailed action plans for final approval by the end of the year. I have asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), to oversee the bidding stage. He, the Minister of State for Local Government and Inner Cities or I will be meeting the authorities to discuss their proposals over the next six weeks.

Once the 10 authorities are chosen, the city action team Ministers will oversee the development of each action plan on behalf of the Government. Day-to-day liaison with the authorities will be the responsibility of the city action teams (CATs); they will provide the point of contact for Government and draw in and co-ordinate the programmes of other Departments. Where there is no CAT, I will ask a Minister to oversee the scheme and will consider whether new interdepartmental machinery is needed.

Initial work on pacemakers will be monitored closely and provided the initiative shows signs of success, I intend the first full competition to take place in 1992, for spending to start in 1993-94.

My objective is to see existing programmes pulled together in the most effective way in areas critical to the health of the city. I want to encourage those authorities which have the qualities of leadership and imagination necessary to rejuvenate their priority areas.

Local authorities invited to submit proposals for pilot city challenge programmes

Barnsley[1]
Birmingham
Bradford
Bristol
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Middlesbrough
Newcastle
Nottingham
Salford
Sheffield
Tower Hamlets
Wirral
Wolverhampton

[1] Invited to work together with Doncaster and Rotherham on a programme for the Dearne Valley, which straddles the areas of the three authorities.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Ordnance Survey is being examined as a candidate for privatisation.

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his answer, Tuesday 14 May 1991, Official Report, c. 65]:* The feasibility of immediate privatisation for Ordnance Survey was considered and rejected immediately prior to the department becoming an executive agency on 1 May 1990. It cannot be ruled out, however, that after a period of years agencies, like other Government activities, may be suitable for privatisation. I shall continue to keep the status of Ordnance Survey under review.

London Population

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment *(a)* what is the current level of population density per acre in London boroughs for planning purposes and *(b)* when it was last reviewed.

Sir George Young *[pursuant to his answer, 2 May 1991, c. 269]:* The most recent estimates of population for each London borough are those prepared by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) for mid-1989. The population densities for each borough on that basis are given in column (A) of the table. The mid-year population estimates are revised annually by OPCS.

The calculation of population densities for the urban areas of each London borough, excluding the main areas of open land and green belt, are available from the 1981 census. Figures on that basis are given in column (B).

Borough	*Population density (A)*	*Persons/acre (B)*
Barking and Dagenham	17	19
Barnet	14	17
Bexley	15	18
Brent	23	23
Bromley	8	14
Camden	34	30
Croydon	15	17
Ealing	21	20
Enfield	13	19
Greenwich	18	20
Hackney	40	37
Hammersmith and Fulham	37	36
Haringey	26	27
Harrow	15	19
Havering	8	18
Hillingdon	9	11
Hounslow	13	14
Islington	46	43
Kensington and Chelsea	44	43
Kingston	15	16
Lambeth	35	36
Lewisham	26	27
Merton	17	17
Newham	23	24
Redbridge	17	20
Richmond	12	11
Southwark	31	30
Sutton	16	17
Tower Hamlets	34	29
Waltham Forest	21	24
Wandsworth	30	29
Westminster	32	31
City of London	6	7

Source:

(A) is 1989 mid-year estimate of borough population by OPCS divided by the total area of the borough.

(B) is the 1981 population density of the urban area, ie the "usually resident population" in 1981 divided by the area defined as urban by OPCS in the 1981 census.

Cleaner Production Information Clearing house

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what involvement Her Majesty's Government have with the international cleaner production information clearing house based at the industry and environment office of the United Nations Environment Programme in Paris.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* Her Majesty's Government are closely involved with the development of the international cleaner production information clearing house. The ICPIC system has been available to users since 1990 and provides a wide range of information services promoting cleaner production. My Department provided substantial support towards the UNEP cleaner production seminar in Canterbury in September 1990 when the ICPIC system was demonstrated to a wide audience of seminar delegates. The Government are wholly supportive of the UNEP cleaner production programme, and will continue to contribute towards the development of the ICPIC database through the clean technology coordinator at Warren Spring laboratory.

Assured Tenancies

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) from where tenants can obtain the correct form required to contest rises in the rent of assured tenancies, and at what cost; how many such outlets there are in the country; if he plans to make the form more freely available; and if he will make a statement;

(2) from where tenants can obtain the explanatory booklet to assist in contesting a rise in the rent of their assured tenancy; how many such outlets there are; if he plans to increase them; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what requirements govern the practice of landlords in informing people in assured tenancies of the four weeks' grace they have between the announcement of a new rent and the date it becomes operative in which to challenge the rise; what requirement there is on landlords to inform such tenants of where to obtain the correct form and the explanatory booklet to facilitate contesting the change; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* Copies of the prescribed form which tenants may use in certain circumstances to refer a proposed new rent to a rent assessment committee are available free of charge from local rent assessment panel offices. There are 13 such offices in England and their addresses are listed in local telephone directories. Firms of legal stationers also produce their own versions of the prescribed forms which are widely available for sale.

Explanatory booklet No. 19, "Assured Tenancies", is available through many outlets including local authorities, housing advice centres and citizens advice bureaux.

The duties on landlords in respect of increasing rent in assured tenancies are set out in section 13 of the Housing Act 1988. Landlord and tenant have the right to agree a new rent between themselves without reference to a third party.

If the contract does not contain a provision for rent changes, and the landlord wishes to increase the rent, he

must serve a notice in the prescribed form on the tenant proposing a new rent. The notice must specifiy the minimum period after the date of service of the notice before the new rent can take effect. In no circumstances can this be less than one month. Rent cannot be increased by this means more frequently than once a year. The prescribed form, "Landlord's Notice proposing a new rent under an assured periodic tenancy or agricultural occupancy" states that the tenant may refer the notice to a rent assessment committee before the beginning of the new period of the tenancy. It also advises tenants to seek advice from a citizens advice bureau, housing aid centre, law centre or a solicitor.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Simazine

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the use of the herbicide Simazine.

Mr. Maclean: Simazine is a pre-emergence triazine herbicide with selective and non-selective uses. It is the active ingredient of some 111 formulated products approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 for professional or amateur use on crops such as beans, apples, pears, currants, sweetcorn and maize, gooseberries, cane fruit, strawberries, hops, asparagus and grapevines. Some products are also approved for use in forestry and non-crop situations.

Organic Farms

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many organic farms are registered in the United Kingdom currently and in each of the last five years; and if any farms have surrendered their organic status.

Mr. Maclean: There is currently no statutory requirement for organic farms to be registered in the United Kingdom. However, under a voluntary scheme administered by the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards 135 farms are registered and 554 are in the process of registering.

Further information on the structure of organic farming may be found on pages 73 to 76 of the 1991 edition of "Farm Incomes in the UK"—available in the Library.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many organic farms are currently registered in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each of the other European Community nations.

Mr. Maclean: There is currently no statutory requirement for organic farms to be registered in the United Kingdom. However under a voluntary scheme administered by the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards 135 farms are registered and 554 are in the process of registering.

Further information on the structure of organic farming in Great Britain may be found on pages 73 to 76 of the 1991 edition of "Farm Incomes in the UK"—available in the Library.

The information requested for other European Community nations is not available.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage organic farming.

Mr. Maclean: The organic sector is eligible for the support given to all farmers under a number of general schemes. These include the farm and conservation grant scheme, the nitrate sensitive areas scheme, the set-aside scheme and the pilot extensification schemes for beef and sheep. Advice from the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service is also available. The processing and marketing of organic produce is being given priority for discretionary European Community grants under our national plans for implementing Community regulation 866/90. We are in addition making a very significant commitment to organic farming research and development. In 1991-92 we are spending over £500,000 on specific organic farming projects and over the next three years this is set to rise to £1 million. We have also commissioned an economic study of organic farming in Great Britain and the full report will be published later this year. We also provide grant aid to the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards that is responsible for establishing standards and for their enforcement. Further support in the form of a specific organic conversion scheme is under consideration.

Potato Crisps

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of additives presently used in the flavouring of British manufactured potato crisps which his Department considers a possible threat to the health of consumers.

Mr. Maclean: I have no reason to believe any other flavours used in potato crisps pose any hazard to health. If they did, we would ban them.

Sheep (Radiation Checks)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep there are in the United Kingdom at the latest date that have to have a radiation check before they can be moved; and how many farms this covers.

Mr. Maclean: The estimated number of animals—immediately post-lambing—is 583,000 on 738 holdings.

EC Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* overall European Commission expenditure as a percentage of overall European Community gross domestic product, *(b)* net European Commission expenditure on agriculture as a percentage of overall European Community gross domestic product and *(c)* the net United Kingdom expenditure on agriculture, including net receipts from the European Commission, as a proportion of United Kingdom gross domestic product, for each year since 1973.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

(a) Total expenditure from the European Community budget as a percentage of European Community gross domestic product (by calendar year)

	Percentage
1973	0·45
1974	0·45
1975	0·54
1976	0·56
1977	0·62
1978	0·74
1979	0·79
1980	0·80
1981	0·78
1982	0·82
1983	0·91
1984	0·95
1985	0·91
1986	0·97
1987	0·95
1988	1·02
1989	0·94
[1]1990	0·99

[1] Budget.

(b)
Expenditure from the European Community budget on agriculture as a percentage of European Community gross domestic product (by calendar year)

Year	Percentage
1973	0·43
1974	0·32
1975	0·41
1976	0·45
1977	0·49
1978	0·56
1979	0·60
1980	0·58
1981	0·51
1982	0·52
1983	0·62
1984	0·66
1985	0·66
1986	0·65
1987	0·64
1988	0·72
1989	0·62
[1]1990	0·65

[1] Budget.

(c)
United Kingdom expenditure on agriculture, including expenditure funded by the European Community as a percentage of United Kingdom gross domestic product (by United Kingdom financial year)

Year	Percentage
1973-74	0·52
1974-75	0·55
1975-76	0·46
1976-77	0·29
1977-78	0·30
1978-79	0·31
1979-80	0·32
1980-81	0·43
1981-82	0·37
1982-83	0·50
1983-84	0·56
1984-85	0·52
1985-86	0·60
1986-87	0·37
1987-88	0·38
1988-89	0·29
1989-90	0·24
[1]1990-91	0·36

[1] Forecast.

Sources:
(a) and *(b)* EC expenditure: 1973-79—Annual Reports of the European Court of Auditors.
1990—EC Budget.
EC gdp—European Economy No. 46.
(c) United Kingdom expenditure: 1973-74—1985-86—Annual Review White Papers.
1986-87—1990-91—Agriculture in the United Kingdom.
United Kingdom gdp: 1973-74—1989-90—CSO Economic Trends 1989-90.
1990-91—Financial Statement and Budget Report 1991-92.

Agencies

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the next steps initiative; and whether he had identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Maclean: There are currently two executive agencies within the department, the Central Veterinary Laboratory and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. Two further candidates have been announced to be launched in April 1992, namely the Central Science Laboratory and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, which will be a joint MAFF and Welsh Office agency. Active consideration is being given to other departmental functions as potential agency candidates.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what EC grants the owners of fishing vessels would be eligible to receive to build new fishing vessels, if the United Kingdom fully implemented a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme in line with EC proposals.

Mr. Maclean: The availability of EC grants for the construction and modernisation of fishing vessels under EC regulation 4028/86 is not dependent on the introduction of a decommissioning scheme. When the latest tranche of EC grant aid was decided last month, no applications for EC grant aid for new construction were successful in any member state.

Beef and Sheep Farmers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the maximum support for beef and sheep farmers in less-favoured areas, for severely disadvantaged areas and for disadvantaged areas—marginal land—respectively, allowable under EC regulations in terms of pounds per hectare; and what is the United Kingdom limit, in similar terms, for these categories.

Mr. Maclean: European Community Council regulation 797/85, as amended, sets a maximum compensatory allowance for cattle and ewes of 102 ecu per hectare of total forage area of the holding in the less-favoured areas. At current green rates, this is equivalent to £77·33.

Under United Kingdom regulations, payments are limited to £62·48 per hectare in the severely disadvantaged areas and £46·86 per hectare in the disadvantaged areas.

Total expenditure under the 1991 scheme is expected to be around £142 million, reflecting a 14 per cent. increase over the previous year.

Beef Premium

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much of the beef premium payments were made *(a)* to primary producers in upland areas and *(b)* to those fattening steers on lowland farms, in the last financial year.

Mr. Maclean: The beef special premium scheme is operated in Great Britain at the point of slaughter and at live auction markets on sale with a view to slaughter. The premium would therefore be payable to any eligible primary producer finishing male cattle. In registering for the scheme, producers are not required to state whether their farms are in upland or in lowland areas. The statistics requested are therefore not available.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses there are in England currently up to the EC standard as defined *(a)* in regulation 355/77 and *(b)* in regulation 860/90.

Mr. Maclean: At present there are 53 red meat and 97 poultry meat slaughterhouses in England which are approved as complying with EC standards. The standards in question are defined in EC directives 64/433 and 71/118 respectively. Regulation 355/77 and its successor, regulation 866/90, relate to financing of investment aimed at improving the processing and marketing of agricultural products. It is a condition of grant aid under these regulations that the project complies with the relevant EC standard.

Beef (Intervention Stores)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the tonnage of beef being held in intervention stores in the EC in each of the past 18 quarters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Tables showing EC and United Kingdom intervention stock levels have been deposited in the Library of the House at monthly intervals throughout the period in question.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has received for the Government to amend their present fish quota restrictions from a species base to an area base; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: None. Monthly quota restrictions relate to individual fish stocks, which are defined by species and area.

Mink Farms

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the size and location of the two mink farms on Humberside listed in his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *317*.

Mr. Maclean: We do not publish this information.

Agricultural and Horticultural Workers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the average wage levels and hours worked for each category of agricultural and horticultural workers in Northumberland; and by how much they exceed the levels determined by the wages board.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available for Northumberland, however, the latest information for a sample of farms in the northern region is provided in the table.

Earnings and hours of regular whole-time workers in agriculture and horticulture

Northern region — *1990 Calendar year*

	Average total hours worked per week	*Average earnings*[1] £/week	*Premium over wage prescribed by Wages Board* £/week
General Farm Workers	46·9	176·61	18·51
Other Stockmen	47·6	192·76	43·47
Tractor Drivers	48·7	216·74	18·57
All hired men[2]	47·2	189·85	24·00

[1] Includes allowances in kind and any bonus paid by employers as a contribution to employees' community charge.
[2] Includes information for foremen, dairy cowmen and horticultural workers for which samples are too small for figures to be shown separately.
Source: Wages and Employment Enquiry: 1990.

Agricultural Land (Ownership)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 9 May, *Official Report*, column *590*, if he will make it his policy to collect information centrally in respect of agricultural land in England and Wales in overseas ownership.

Mr. Maclean: No. The costs and practical difficulties of adopting such a policy are excessive and outweigh the potential benefits.

River Pollution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those polluted stretches of rivers and estuaries from which the public should not eat fish.

Mr. Gummer: My Department has recently issued advice to anglers that it is inadvisable to eat fish caught in polluted waters. If anglers are in doubt about whether a particular stretch of water is polluted, they should seek advice locally from the National Rivers Authority which will be able to advise if the water is of poor quality on the basis of its rivers classification scheme.

The Government's advice does not apply to commercial fisheries which take place in or near estuaries. My Department monitors commercial fisheries both in estuaries and at sea to protect public health and the results show the quality of the water in the areas of these fisheries causes no problems for the species sold.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many calves born since July 1988 have been found to have BSE.

Mr. Gummer: BSE has been confirmed in one calf born since July 1988. Inquiries as to the source of the disease are still continuing.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *398*, why he is unable to give the number of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom for each month from January to April.

Mr. Gummer: The scientific calculation of the number of cases of BSE is based on the date of onset of clinical disease and there is a prolonged period of time between this and eventual confirmation of disease by post-mortem examination. This means that recent figures are necessarily incomplete and would therefore be misleading.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of cases of BSE in 1991 have been found in farms for the first time.

Mr. Gummer: Twenty-seven per cent. of the cases of BSE confirmed in Great Britain between January and April 1991 were on farms on which no previous case had been confirmed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total number of confirmed cases for BSE by county at the latest available date in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: The information up to 17 May 1991 is as follows:

County	*Cases*
ENGLAND	
North	
Cleveland	33
Cumbria	511
Durham	101
Humberside	116
Northumberland	114
Tyne and Wear	4
Yorkshire, North	1,075
Yorkshire, South	91
Yorkshire, West	127
Total	2,172
Midlands and West	
Cheshire	742
Derbyshire	417
Hereford and Worcester	521
Lancashire	605
Leicestershire	634
Manchester	28
Merseyside	14
Nottinghamshire	169
Shropshire	657
Staffordshire	510
West Midlands	17
Warwickshire	277
Total	4,591
East	
Bedfordshire	76
Cambridgeshire	100
Essex	115
Hertfordshire	126
Lincolnshire	228
Norfolk	419
Northamptonshire	225
Suffolk	338
Total	1,627
South-East	
Berkshire	175
Buckinghamshire	246
Hampshire	1,023
Isle of Wight	207
Kent	580
London	15
Oxfordshire	416
Surrey	268
Sussex East	372
Sussex West	714
Total	4,016
South-West	
Avon	537
Cornwall	2,063
Devon	2,994
Dorset	2,354
Gloucestershire	844
Somerset	2,477
Wiltshire	1,712
Total	12,981
WALES	
Clwyd	311
Dyfed	1,136
Glamorgan Mid	69
Glamorgan South	68
Glamorgan West	14
Gwent	200
Gwynedd	76
Powys	252
Total	2,126
SCOTLAND	
South	
Borders	49
Central	29
Dumfries	190
Lothian	21
Strathclyde	256
Total	545
North	
Fife	55
Grampian	190
Highland	53
Orkney	9
Shetland	3
Tayside	76
Western Isles	1
Total	932
NORTHERN IRELAND	
Antrim	58
Armagh	16
Down	43
Fermanagh	19
Londonderry	19
Tyrone	38
Total	193

Bovine Somatotropin

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Veterinary Products Committee discussed bovine somatotropin in 1991; what were the outcomes of these discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Committee has discussed BST twice in 1991.

In April it advised that it remained unsatisfied on the animal safety and welfare aspects of certain BST products, and that this should be reflected in the line taken in discussions in the EC Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products. This advice was accepted.

In May the committee considered an article published in the *British Medical Journal* on 2 March and reviewed relevant data. It considered it likely that it would be able to confirm its earlier advice that the products could be used without hazard to human health, but wished first to seek the opinions of independent advisors with special expertise in certain of the matters raised.

The committee has also been informed of, but has not discussed, the extension of the Community moratorium on BST use, developments in the CVMP, and the hon. Member's parliamentary questions on the subject.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to review his decision to refuse a product licence for bovine somatotropin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I shall review the decisions in the light of advice from the Medicines Commission following its consideration of companies' appeals. I have no other plans to review them.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether there are any proposals from member states of the Commission for the EC to end its moratorium on the case of bovine somatotropin; what discussions he has had within the EC on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission has made no such proposals and I am aware of none from any member state.

Sheep Dipping

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many forms, and what proportion, were returned from sheep farmers about sheep dipping last year; what measures he intends to take to ensure that all forms are received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Local authority estimates suggest that approximately 70 per cent. of form R owner declarations of dipping were returned to local authorities. It is for local authorities to take action in those cases where forms are not returned but I have made it clear that I am looking for a much better response from farmers during this year's national dip.

Ear Punching

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what comments he has received from the Farm Animal Welfare Council concerning the ear punching of cattle; and if he has any plans to discontinue the practice;

(2) what comments he has received from the Farm Animal Welfarm Council concerning the ear punching of sheep; and if he will take steps to halt this practice when the variable premium scheme ceases.

Mr. Maclean: In its report on the welfare of livestock at markets in 1986, the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended that on welfare grounds methods should be found for certifying livestock under the premium schemes which did not involve ear punching.

In their response, the Government noted that provided punches were kept sharp and used by properly trained staff, stress to the animals was kept to a minimum. The Government also stated their willingness to consider other methods which would meet the requirements of the Community schemes, but to date no satisfactory alternatives have been found. There are therefore no plans at present to discontinue this control mechanism in relation to cattle. For sheep, however, the need for ear punching under the variable premium scheme will no longer exist when the scheme ends in January 1992.

Land Contamination

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice his Department has given to farmers whose land is contaminated by spills of inflammable liquids; and what such contaminations he is aware of having taken place since 1987.

Mr. Maclean: The Department investigates incidents involving the spillage of inflammable liquid on agricultural land in view of the possible food safety implications. In the light of the results of such investigations, advice would be provided to the farmer or other measures taken as appropriate. The only recent incident involving such a spillage of which the Department is aware concerned the derailment and fire on a train at Bradford-on-Tone, Taunton on 16 May this year.

PRIME MINISTER

United Nations Register

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will set up a register of arms, in line with his request for a United Nations register; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We believe that, in order to be effective, the register should be set up under United Nations auspices on a universal and non-discriminatory basis. That is the approach which we are pursuing.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the timetable for consultation on, and implementation of, proposals for a channel tunnel rail link;

(2) if he will make a statement on the consultation process which he will undertake on the options for the channel tunnel rail link route.

Mr. Freeman: We are considering British Rail's report on the rail link options. To publish details of all the routes

under consideration could cause needless worry and blight. Once the Government have announced a decision on the way forward it will be for British Rail to undertake wide consultation on the preferred route before embarking on the formal approval process.

Vehicle Smoke

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department will take in response to complaints from the public about smoke from cars, vans and other vehicles not subject to operator licensing.

Mr. Chope: Excessive smoke is usually emitted by diesel rather than petrol engines. As heavy goods vehicles and buses are likely to be the main offenders, and are also the ones against which sanctions are available under operator licensing, the Department has given priority to those larger vehicles. Instrumented checks of emissions from cars and light goods vehicles will, however, be part of MOT tests from 1 November.

Motorways

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards the surfacing of future motorways in concrete rather than tarmac.

Mr. Chope: Current policy is to permit contractors as wide a choice of materials for road pavements as possible. This encourages competition between different suppliers and ensures the best value for money.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much traffic on the M1 had been reduced since the reopening of the M40 to Birmingham.

Mr. Chope: Traffic flows on the M1 south of M6 have been reduced by between 4,000 and 19,000 vehicles per weekday since the opening of M40 to Birmingham.

Rail Tracks

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will direct British Rail to cease immediately the practice of installing DC single-rail track circuits on non-electrified lines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail has already decided to cease the practice of installing DC single-rail track circuits on non-electrified lines. BR is also planning a programme of modifications to existing DC single-rail track circuits on non-electrified lines.

Birmingham Western Orbital Route

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of his consultation exercise on his proposals for a privately funded Birmingham western orbital route.

Mr. Rifkind: Private sector firms have responded positively to my suggestion of a private finance competition for the western orbital route. I now propose to go ahead with a competition for the road on this basis. I look forward to seeing their proposals for designing, financing, constructing and operating this road.

I share the concern of local interests about the need to protect the environment and avoid delay. I can give the assurance that proposals for privately financed schemes will be subject to the same rigorous environmental appraisal as conventional roads. I will also keep the target for completion of this important facility as the late 1990s, as it had been for the public scheme.

It is important to move quickly in setting up a competition. I will shortly be inviting prequalifying bids from the private sector, so that a full competition can be held as soon as possible.

Taxi Fares (London)

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about London taxi fares.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State has made an order increasing London taxi fares by about 8·9 per cent. on average with effect from Saturday 8 June 1991. The new tariff will incorporate a minimum fare of £1·00—including an unchanged hire charge of 40p—for the first 940·5 yd or 3 minutes 13·5 seconds. The rate will then be 20p for every 313·5 yd or 1 minute 4·5 seconds up to 6 miles and 20p for each 209 yd or 43 seconds thereafter.

Correspondence

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the letter dated 6 February from Nithsdale Road Link-up Group; and what reply he has sent.

Mr. Chope: The letter was received in my Department on 14 February. It made a number of helpful suggestions for raising public awareness about the law on rear seat belt wearing by children which came into force on 1 September 1989 and described what the group itself is doing locally to achieve this. The reply explained the publicity which the Department, and some commercial organisations, gave to introduction of the law and the arrangements for providing information about it subsequently. It also offered comments on the text of a publicity leaflet produced by the group.

I have sent a copy of the reply to the hon. Member.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that speed limiter systems fitted to heavy goods vehicles are fitted only by authorised organisations trained in installation, calibration and sealing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government have tabled an amendment to the Road Traffic Bill to enable the Secretary of State to make regulations about speed limiter installation. The Department is considering with vehicle operators' associations and speed limiter manufacturers what, if any, regulations might be needed if this provision is enacted.

Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement listing the money his Department has contributed to road schemes in the Chelmsford local authority area in each of the financial years since 1979-80; and what are his forward plans for the next three years.

Mr. Chope: My Department pays 50 per cent. transport supplementary grant towards accepted expenditure on local authority road schemes.

Before 1985-86 TSG was a general grant and not linked to individual projects. Under the present system, expenditure on specified major road schemes may be accepted for grant. Since 1985-86, accepted expenditure for such schemes in the Chelmsford borough council area has been as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	5·279
1986-87	7·167
1987-88	6·335
1988-89	5·846
1989-90	5·835
1990-91	2·189

A further £0·506 million expenditure on major schemes in the Chelmsford area has been accepted for TSG in 1991-92. This is less than in previous years because a number of schemes have been completed. Allocations for future years will be decided in the light of information in the county's annual transport policies and programme submissions and other competing bids.

Block TSG allocations have also been given for expenditure on minor works in the county as a whole, but it is for the county council to decide how much to spend in each district council's area.

In addition, the Department has spent over £36 million since 1979 on improving its own A12 trunk road through the district, including the following amounts on the Chelmsford bypass:

	£ million
1984-85	5·978
1985-86	15·457
1986-87	11·111
1987-88	1·804
1988-89	1·218
1989-90	0·489

The next major trunk road schemes in the area will be the construction of part of the new M12 from the M25 and the widening of the Chelmsford bypass, but only relatively minor sums will be spent on the design and preparation of these proposals over the next two or three years.

Vehicle Tax Discs

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicle tax discs have been issued as replacements for stolen discs in each of the last three years for which such information is available.

Mr. Chope: The total number of duplicate licences issued for all reasons in each of the last three financial years was:

	Number
1990-91	146,720
1989-90	132,075
1988-89	135,649

Separate records are not kept of the number of duplicate motor vehicle tax discs issued because the original has been stolen. Duplicate tax discs are also issued if the original has been lost, destroyed or mutilated so that it can no longer be used.

Channel Tunnel

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the approximate cost of the works that have been carried out and are due to be carried out on the designated existing channel tunnel rail routes to enable continental through freight and passenger services to be run after opening; and what is the approximate breakdown between *(a)* the terminal at Waterloo, *(b)* the Redhill to Tonbridge electrification, *(c)* the installation of continuous welded rail and other improvements to existing track, *(d)* improved signalling, *(e)* bridge reconstruction, *(f)* construction of new passing loops and *(g)* other main heads of cost.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail currently expects to spend approximately £700 million, at 1990-91 prices, on infrastructure works to enable European passenger and freight services to operate when the channel tunnel opens. £142 million will be spent on building the international terminal at Waterloo, £21 million on electrifying the line between Tonbridge and Redhill, £9 million on bridge reconstruction and £250 million on new track, upgrading existing track and improving signalling. The remaining £278 million covers other projects, including the North Pole maintenance depot, freight inspection facilities and freight terminals in London and elsewhere.

British Rail

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has approved the plan for re-organisation of British Rail entitled "Organisation for Quality"; and if he will place copies of relevant documents in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail has kept the Department in close touch with its planned reorganisation, which should improve management accountability and its focus on the customer. I shall place a summary of the proposals in the Library shortly.

Motorway Speed Limits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has commissioned any recent study to evaluate the effects of *(a)* traffic flow, *(b)* accident risk and *(c)* pollution of the environment arising from an increased speed limit on motorways of 90 mph.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the speed limit on motorways.

Mr. Chope: I have no such plans, but a review of speed limits is currently being undertaken.

Road Accidents

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of road accidents causing one or more fatalities in which vehicles carrying inflammable liquids were involved for each year since 1985, giving the total number of dead and injured for each year.

Mr. Chope: I regret that I am unable to do this.

The Department collects information only on road accidents involving personal injury. The standard report

form, STATS19, completed by the police for these accidents does not include information on cargoes carried by the vehicles involved.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the accident rates for equivalent lengths of contraflow for each of the past three years.

Mr. Chope: The information is not available in the form requested. Detailed studies into the safety of major motorway roadworks were carried out by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory on schemes carried out in 1982 and 1987. The studies concluded that rates were about 0·18 personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres or nearly 1·6 times the rate on motorways without roadworks, but even so only about a sixth of the rate on built-up A-class roads. Rates were found to be higher than the average in the contraflow section itself, slightly higher at the approach and lower beyond. A new study of safety at contraflows on all-purpose dual carriageways has begun and will report in December 1992. The TRRL will also be updating its earlier motorway studies.

Driving Instructors

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with the Driving Standards Agency regarding the qualifications required for the disabled becoming driving instructors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Driving Standards Agency has circulated a discussion paper on this subject to officials within the Department and at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency at Swansea. A meeting to discuss the paper will be held shortly.

Shale Fire, Midlothian

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the safety implications for rail travellers, of the underground shale fire at Newbridge, Midlothian.

Mr. Freeman: The fire on the embankment at Newbridge is being closely monitored by British Rail, which is taking remedial action and has meanwhile imposed a 5 mph speed limit on the affected line. I am assured that there is no risk to passengers.

Syston Bypass

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce his decision on the inspector's report on the inquiry regarding the A607 Syston northern bypass; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Early next month.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will introduce legislation requiring those persons owning certain breeds of dogs to obtain third-party insurance; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will introduce legislation enabling American pit bull terriers to be humanely destroyed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will bring forward proposals to add American pit bull terriers and Japanese tosas to the list of dangerous animals specified under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 to make owners liable to prosecution even if a dog is put down after an attack; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he will introduce legislation requiring owners of certain breeds of dogs to have their dogs on a short chain lead and muzzled whenever in a public place; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if he will introduce legislation banning the breeding within the United Kingdom of fighting dogs, including American pit bull terriers; and if he will make a statement;

(7) what legislation he proposes to introduce concerning dangerous dogs; and if he will make a statement;

(8) if he will introduce a ban into the United Kingdom on the import and export of fighting dogs, including American pit bull terriers; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ban with immediate effect the import of pit bull terrier and tosa dogs.

Ms. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that my right hon. Friend made in the House on Wednesday 22 May at columns 945-46.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the arrangements for those attacked and injured by dogs to apply to the criminal injuries compensation scheme for compensation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The board can entertain applications from victims of attacks by dogs or other animals where a crime of violence has been committed, for example, where a dog has been deliberately set on the victim.

Automatic Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has that fully automatic weapons, including the Uzi submachine gun, are illegally on sale in south Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am aware of the allegations made in "The Cook Report" television programme broadcast on 20 May. The investigation of such matters is for local chief officers of police, to whom any relevant information should be passed.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will obtain for his departmental library a video recording of the Central Television programme "The Cook Report", broadcast on 20 May.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department has a recording of this programme.

Mr. Liwa Uddin

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he arranged for the British high commission in Islamabad to issue a visa to Mr. Liwa

Uddin following the dismissal by the immigration appeals tribunal of the Home Office appeal on 7 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The tribunal's written determination of 7 May was sent by facsimile to the entry clearance officer in Islamabad on 22 May. It is for him to pursue the case, taking account of the adjudicator's findings.

Radio Authority

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will dismiss Lord Chalfont as head of the Radio Authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Courts

74. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals to increase the staff numbers in Crown courts.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor presently intends to increase staff numbers in the Crown Court during 1991-92 by approximately 62 above those in post as at 1 April 1991. Staffing levels in the courts are fixed in relation to current and anticipated workload.

General Pinochet

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General if the Director of Public Prosecutions will consider whether any charges may be brought in the United Kingdom against General Pinochet in relation to offences of murder and torture in that country which may constitute crimes capable of proscecution in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The United Kingdom has no jurisdiction concerning any offence of murder committed by a foreign national in Chile. Since 29 September 1988 the offence of torture has been justiciable in this country wherever it might have taken place, by virtue of section 34 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The Act has no retrospective effect.

Court Procedures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what training is given to court staff to assist them in advising plaintiffs intending to make small claims for personal injury;

(2) what training is given to court staff to help them advise plaintiffs in small claims procedures.

The Attorney-General: A range of training courses, covering the various steps of civil business procedures, are available to staff in the county courts. This enables staff to assist litigants with court procedure.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what advice is given to court staff about referral of personal injury case plaintiffs to specialist legal assistance.

The Attorney-General: Very few personal injury cases are presently commenced without professional help. Training given enables staff to assist litigants with procedural advice.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will bring forward proposals to extend to England and Wales the provision applicable in Northern Ireland for courts to obtain and pay for expert medical and other reports in small claims personal injury cases.

The Attorney-General: There is presently nothing which compels personal injury claimants to use the small claims procedure and therefore no need for such a provision. Should the policy change, this possibility would be considered.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how many court staff received training in *(a)* small claims procedures and *(b)* personal injury cases in each of the last five years.

The Attorney-General: This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. As a matter of principle, all county court staff receive training which enables them to assist litigants with procedures in civil litigation.

Ativan

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received from those engaged in legal action against Wyeth on account of the harmful effects of the drug Ativan about the availability of legal aid; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Neither I nor my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor have received any representations about the availability of legal aid to pursue legal actions against Wyeth concerning the drug Ativan. The Legal Aid Board is responsible for the administration of legal aid in such cases and it is not aware of any difficulties over the legal aid arrangements.

Repossessions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General how many court actions relating to mortgage repossessions there were in Doncaster county court in each year since 1979 to 1990 and for 1991 to date.

The Attorney-General: The number of mortgage actions for possession entered and orders made for possession in Doncaster county court in each year since 1986, the first year for which figures are available, and for the first four months of 1991 are shown in the table.

	Number of mortgage possession actions entered	*Number of mortgage possession orders made*
1986	546	159
1987	559	242
1988	564	313
1989	478	335
1990	594	415
[1]1991	252	169

[1] January to April.

WALES

Housing Consultancy Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value of housing consultancy work given by him to Aldbourne Associates in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the current year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The value of the work done lies in the support given to improvements in housing management on PEP estates and elsewhere, for which expenditure totalled £228,514 in the financial year 1989-90, £249,161 in 1990-91, and £16,038 so far in 1991-92, the final year of the main contract. Work has been done on a cost-reimbursable basis.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the continuation of groundwater studies beyond 31 July related to the proposed barrage and the impact of the raised water table on properties in central Cardiff.

Mr. David Hunt: I have had no such consultations with the chairman of the development corporation. My officials are in touch with officers of the corporation about the progress of the groundwater studies as part of their routine liaison.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide comparable but extended figures for Wales to those put in the Library by the Secretary of State for the Environment on 4 April 1990, deposit 5906, showing, for each local authority area and giving the assumptions made about equalisation, what level of (i) capital value rates, (ii) council tax and (iii) local income tax would be required in order to raise the same amount of revenue as with *(a)* the 1991-92 community charge, both before and after community charge reduction grant, and *(b)* the 1991-92 community charge, both before and after community charge reduction grant, but on the basis that the community charge was fully operational without any transitional or related elements.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my statement to the House of Commons on 23 April, and to the material which was placed in the Library of the House on that day. This gives full information on the illustrative effect on household bills had the council tax been in place in Wales in 1991-92.

Grey Seals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the last survey of the population of grey seals along the Welsh coastline was undertaken; and if he has any plans to fund another survey.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that the last comprehensive survey of the population of grey seals along the Welsh coastline was undertaken in 1974.

The Countryside Council for Wales is currently considering an application for grant aid from a consortium of agencies, led by the Dyfed Wildlife Trust, to undertake a census of seals in Cardigan bay. They are very interested and sympathetic but await further details of research methodology and technical details before decisions can be made.

Tobacco

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to mark World No Tobacco Day, on 31 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: While recognising the importance of World No Tobacco Day, particularly in those countries with no national event, my Department concentrates its efforts on the United Kingdom's long-established and successful National No Smoking Day which was held this year on Wednesday 13 March.

Mink Farms

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the size and location of each mink farm currently operating in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I am not aware of any mink farms currently operating in Wales.

Right to Buy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities in Wales have put forward schemes for Welsh Office approval under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988, whereby local authorities can provide council tenants with a cash grant to help them buy a home in the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: One authority undertook a scheme during 1990-91 and is currently evaluating the results. A second authority has recently indicated an interest in operating a similar scheme.

University College, Swansea

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline the basis for his decision to subtract any European Community funding towards the innovation centre at University college, Swansea.

Mr. David Hunt: No application has yet been received for European regional development fund assistance for phase II of the innovation centre at University college Swansea.

Manufacturing Output

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of figures showing the value of manufacturing output levels in Wales in each year since 1975 at constant 1975 prices.

Mr. David Hunt: Changes in the level of manufacturing output at constant prices are best measured by the index of industrial production and construction for Wales (1985 = 100). Annual averages from 1978 are given in the following table. Welsh figures for years prior to 1978 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Index of manufacturing output Wales

	1985 = 100
1978	101·0
1979	103·7
1980	91·4
1981	92·9
1982	91·7
1983	95·1
1984	100·0
1985	100·0
1986	104·7
1987	116·7
1988	128·1
1989	131·6
1990	133·8

Information Division

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details for the last three years showing *(a)* the overall budget of the Welsh Office information division, *(b)* the amount of money dispersed by the information division to outside advertising agencies and *(c)* the percentage of moneys dispersed to advertising agencies which has been accounted for by advertising companies based in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: For information on the Department's total publicity budget, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 April 1991.

The overall budget of the Welsh Office information division for the past three years is: for 1988-89 £1,239,003; for 1989-90 £1,375,806; and for 1990-91 £729,647.

The amount of money dispersed by the information division to outside advertising agencies for 1988-89 is available only at disproportionate costs; for 1989-90 £266,670; and for 1990-91 £265,956·18.

The percentage of moneys dispersed to advertising agencies which has been accounted for by advertising agencies in Wales for 1988-89 is only available at disproportionate costs: for 1989-90 it is 58·14 per cent. and for 1990-91 it is 71·07 per cent.

Newtown Bypass

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to be able to announce the starting date for the construction of the proposed Newtown bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I shall be appointing consultants shortly to develop a scheme to bypass Newtown which we have recently added to the Department's long-term trunk road programme. It is too soon to indicate when construction might commence.

Craft Initiative

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many craft business advisers are employed in Wales under the craft initiative; what is their job description; how many were so employed on 1 May 1988, 1989 and 1990, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: During the period of the craft initiative, which came to an end in March this year, three craft business advisers were employed and were in post on the dates in question. Two were employed by the Welsh Development Agency and one by the Development Board for Rural Wales. Their job description was to provide a first point of contact for access to the full range of services offered by Government agencies in Wales, the Wales Craft Council, local authorities and enterprise agencies. As experienced craft producers, they were also to offer advice on craft businesses.

The WDA currently employs three craft advisers. I understand that the role of the DBRW's adviser will also be retained, as part of an expanded marketing department.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how Government money devoted to the craft initiative is spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The craft initiative came to an end on 31 March this year. An evaluation of the initiative has been placed in the Library of the House. New arrangements for support of the craft industry in Wales have been put in place.

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what cash increase had been allowed to general practioners in Wales in their indicative dry budget in 1991 and 1992 as compared with their dry expenditure in 1990; and on what basis it is computed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The indicative amounts which, in accordance with section 18 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, family health services authorities specify for GP practices' prescribing are not cash budgets.

In setting the indicative amounts for 1991-92, FHSAs have used as the starting point the basic price of drugs prescribed by and dispensed for each practice in 1989-90. This figure has been adjusted by a national—England and Wales—uplift factor to take account of changes such as those in the price of drugs. Each FHSA's medical adviser will then have considered whether the resultant figure for each practice appeared to be justifiable on clinical grounds and will have taken into account any new factors which might bear upon the prescribing of that practice. All GP practices will have been offered the opportunity to discuss their indicative amounts with the responsible FHSA's medical adviser.

The assignment of an indicative amount will not prevent any GP from prescribing the drugs which their patients need.

Training

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of trainees in Wales who will take advantage of the new training voucher scheme in each of the last three years of its availability.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1991-92 the North-East Wales training and enterprise council estimates that between 1,200 and 1,500 young people will take advantage of its training credit in its pilot scheme. Credits will be extended progressively throughout Great Britain year by year. Initially TECs and local enterprise companies will be invited to submit proposals for local schemes offering training credits in their localities to come into operation in April 1993. Schemes will be selected to cover another 10

per cent. of the national total of 16 to 17-year-olds leaving full-time education. We intend that within five years, every 16 to 17-year-old leaving full-time education will have the offer of a training credit.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much additional finance will be available for the new training voucher scheme in Wales in 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 respectively; and if he will also publish for each year the total finance available for these credit vouchers, taking into account all existing and new schemes.

Mr. David Hunt: The level of additional resources to be made available to the north-east Wales training credit pilot in 1992-93 has not yet been finalised. For subsequent years the total resources available for training credits in Wales will depend on the speed with which coverage is extended in the Principality.

University Hospital of Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had concerning the future of the epilepsy unit at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has received representations from hon. Members and from members of the public, including a petition.

Health Authority Referrals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen or women of the nine health authorities in Wales regarding the amounts to be set aside for extra-contractual referrals and the circumstances for its use.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for individual health authorities to determine within the record resources made available to them for 1991-92.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out in tabular form for 1991-92 *(a)* the projected income from employees' national insurance contributions, *(b)* the estimated current expenditure (i) of the national health service, (ii) on state retirement pension, (iii) on unemployment benefit and (iv) on all other social security payments and *(c)* the percentage *(a)* represents of *(b)*.

Mr. Jack: The information requested on estimated income and expenditure in 1991-92 is in the table.

	£ billion
(a) Employees national insurance contributions[1]	13·7
(b) Expenditure of the NHS	31·8
Expenditure on retirement pension[2]	25·5
Expenditure on unemployment benefit	1·0
Expenditure on all other social security payments[3]	36·4
(c) Percentage *(a)* represents of *(b)*	14·5 per cent.

[1] Includes £1·9 billion contribution to the NHS.
[2] Excluding non-contributory retirement pension.
[3] All other social security benefit spending including all local authority spending on housing benefit and community charge benefit.

War Widow's Pensions

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the level of war widow's pension or equivalent benefit in all EC countries which sustained casualties in the second world war.

Mr. Jack: Currently war widow's pensions administered by the Department range from a standard £67·60 a week to a possible £103·42 including age and rank additions. These pensions are payable to all widows whose husbands' death is attributable to service at any time. In addition second world war widows and all other pre-1973 war widows receive special payments of £44·36 a week from the Ministry of Defence. These sums are in addition to anything which may be payable under Ministry of Defence occupational schemes.

The European Commission does not collect information on war widows' pensions payable in the member states. The table gives such information as we have been able to obtain on other countries' schemes. I am advised that rates vary widely depending on such factors as military rank or previous civilian occupation.

	Weekly rate
Denmark	Between £89·69 and £129·15.
France	Between £39·51 and £107·11.
Italy	£30·34 plus supplement of £5·96 if annual income less than £3,543. If husband died after the war, £14·21—£14·69.
Belgium	£97·94, if husband killed in service.
Germany	£38·10 (basic rate) plus supplements according to factors such as extent of injuries—up to a total weekly maximum pension of about £167·71.

Notes:
1. The rates have been changed into sterling using purchasing power parities.
2. In France an additional allowance may be payable if the widow has no other pension.

Payment Delays

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance manual, "Departmental Compensation Scheme for Delay in Payment of Benefit and Refund of Contributions".

Miss Widdecombe: I described the basic principles underlying the payment of compensation for delay in my reply of 13 May at column *30*. It would not be appropriate to make public internal guidance notes.

Motability

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether there is any financial disadvantage for a company selling a vehicle purchased through the motability scheme;

(2) if there is any evidence of companies operating a differential charge for those purchasing vehicles with and without assistance from the motability scheme.

Mr. Scott: Motability is an independent charity. The terms and conditions under which companies provide vehicles under the scheme are a matter for Motability.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many, and what percentage, of people on mobility allowance have purchased a vehicle through the motability scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the motability scheme is a matter for Motability itself. However, as at 9 May 1991, mobility allowance was being paid direct to Motability Finance Ltd. on behalf of 79,997 people who have lease agreements with Motability and 17,042 with hire purchase agreements. The combined total represents 14·9 per cent. of all mobility allowance beneficiaries.

Mr. Neil Farmer

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the compensation recovery unit to resolve its position in respect of Mr. Neil Farmer of 7 Welton gardens, Bulwell, Nottingham, and to write to him.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the compensation recovery scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Farmer's Lung

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now take steps to provide a scheme of no-fault compensation for those who have suffered farmer's lung after working in agriculture.

Mr. Scott: Employed workers in agriculture who suffer disablement as a result of farmer's lung are eligible for benefits under the industrial injuries scheme.

Pensioner Couples

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those benefits and their average value which are available to pensioner couples on basic pensions who are in receipt of income support.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 22 April 1991, c. 327]:* I regret that some of the information given was incorrect. In the list of benefits, the entry "Industrial injury benefit" should read "Industrial injuries benefits". Also, the third foot-note should explain that invalidity benefit and sickness benefit can continue for up to five years after pensionable age in place of retirement pension. For invalidity benefit this will be paid at an equivalent rate, for sickness benefit there is a 5 per cent. abatement. One partner may elect to retain their invalidity or sickness benefit while the other may choose to receive retirement pension. However, a married woman, relying solely on her husband's contributions, cannot take her retirement pension until he has claimed his.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Hong Kong on the recent recommendations of the Electoral Reform Society on electoral reform in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This report deals with matters which are the responsibility of the Hong Kong Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not discussed it with them.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *599*, regarding his proposed non-involvement relating to the new airport for Hong Kong, if he will give details of any action taken during and subsequent to his visit to the far east.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As I said in my answer of 31 January at column *599*, the provision of a rail link to Hong Kong's new airport is a matter for the Hong Kong Government.

Antarctica

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to repeal the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Not at present. We shall await the outcome of the next meeting of Antarctic treaty parties in Madrid next month before a decision is taken on what action is required.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to sign the draft protocol of the Antarctic treaty parties agreed at the Madrid summit.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The final text of the protocol has not yet been agreed by the Antarctic treaty parties. It would, therefore, be premature to speculate on a date for its signature.

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the achievements and failures in international arms control involving his Department in the past year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the course of the last 12 months, the CFE treaty has been signed, although problems remain over Soviet implementation of certain of its provisions. The treaty eliminating United States and Soviet intermediate nuclear forces has been implemented successfully. There is also the prospect of a START treaty reducing United States and Soviet strategic arsenals, and of reductions in short-range nuclear forces in Europe. We are working to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime; for the continued expansion of the missile technology control regime; and to make a success of United Nations Security Council resolution No. 687's requirements in relation to Iraq's nuclear, biological chemical and missile capabilities. We have welcomed President Bush's recent proposal for completion of a chemical weapons convention within 12 months, and are preparing for the third review conference of the biological weapons convention which will offer an opportunity to strengthen that regime.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigative groups have been established, pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 687 on verification and

destruction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction; what involvement there is of United Kingdom experts in these groups; what offers of personnel and resource assistance were made by Her Majesty's Government to the United Nations in support of resolution 687; and what estimation of cost to the Exchequer has been made of United Kingdom participation in furtherance of resolution 687.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Pursuant to section C of Security Council resolution 687, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has established a special commission, and the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency with the assistance and co-operation of the special commission, has established an action team. They are making arrangements for inspections required by the resolution. The United Kingdom has given technical help and equipment to the International Atomic Energy Agency for its initial inspection in Iraq, which is already in progress. A senior United Kingdom expert in chemical and biological defence matters is the British member of the special commission and is playing a prominent part in its work. The United Kingdom has offered to make available other experts and analytical services. We are now considering what further assistance we can provide. The cost to the United Kingdom of these aspects of Security Council resolution 687 cannot yet be estimated because the scale of the required activities is still being assessed and no decision has yet been made on how they will be funded.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to extend to two hours the time the Minister of State with responsibility for arms control spends with non-governmental organisations at the next collective meeting held to discuss Government policy on arms control and disarmament matters.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I attend the meeting for as long as my other commitments permit, and allow ample time for discussion of the major issues. Additional questions are thereafter fielded by a team of officials.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting with non-governmental organisations with the Minister of State with responsibility for arms control on 14 May.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At my meeting with non-Governmental organisations on 14 May a wide range of arms control and disarmament topics were discussed. The proceedings were held under Chatham house rules and were thus off the record.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise the issues of nuclear non-proliferation controls and a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty at the forthcoming North Atlantic Treaty Organisation summit meeting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Preparations for the NATO summit are at an early stage; but we regularly discuss these matters with our allies and partners.

EFTA

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will endeavour to ensure that in the negotiations between European Free Trade Association countries and the EC, any reduction in tariff rates is matched by the restoration of access for EC fishermen to EFTA country waters.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The EC/EFTA negotiations on a European economic area are aimed at extending the Community single market to the EFTA countries. On fisheries, the Community is pressing for greater access to EFTA fishing grounds in exchange for some liberalisation of trade between the two sides. We are working to ensure that the final outcome satisfies the interests of the United Kingdom fisheries industry.

South Atlantic Fisheries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has given to the Uruguay proposals for south Atlantic fisheries.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The proposed Uruguayan scientific conference in Montevideo in June to discuss South Atlantic fisheries has now been cancelled. As the Falklands fishery is one of the main fisheries in the region, we had arranged United Kingdom representation at the conference, and will always give due attention to any Uruguayan proposals on South Atlantic fisheries.

UNESCO

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what progress has been made in UNESCO towards reforms and as to what issues remain unresolved in the way of the return of the United Kingdom to UNESCO.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We recognise that progress towards reform has been made in UNESCO since we left in 1985. But before we are able to consider re-joining, we need to see real improvements to achieve programme concentration; progress towards greater decentralisation; implementation of management and administration reforms; and improvements in setting UNESCO's budget.

Kuwait

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will direct Her Majesty's ambassador to Kuwait to lodge a formal protest with the Kuwaiti Government about the conduct of trials of alleged Iraqi collaborators.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Kuwait about the quality of justice dispensed to those charged with collaboration with the Iraqis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have stressed to the Kuwaiti authorities on a number of occasions in the last few months our hope that trials of detainees for war crimes or collaboration would follow due processes of law and respect human rights. Her Majesty's ambassador has recently re-emphasised the Government's concern that proper arrangements for the presentation of evidence and the defence of those accused at such trials should be carefully observed. We understand that the courts in Kuwait have adjourned a number of cases to enable defence lawyers to study prosecution evidence and prepare their cases more thoroughly. We welcome this.

President Mubarak

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with President Mubarak prior to the announcement on 8 May of the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' discussions with President Mubarak in Cairo on 2 May covered bilateral and regional issues, including regional security.

We have consistently made clear that it is for the states of the region to take the lead in devising arrangements for their security.

Arab Security Force

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the establishment of an Arab security force in the Gulf.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Gulf Co-operation Council, Egypt and Syria are developing regional security proposals based on the Damascus declaration. GCC countries have agreed in principle to establish a common deterrent force. We have said that we will help to underpin regionally agreed arrangements, if asked, but do not envisage troops in the region permanently.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards challenge inspections to support a chemical weapons control regime.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider that a system of intrusive challenge inspection will be necessary to provide an effective verification regime for a future chemical weapons convention.

Gas Fires

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the inside ambient temperature at his Department below which the gas fires are permitted to be used; and what steps have been taken at his Department to improve energy efficiency.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office aims to provide an inside ambient temperature of 16C (61F) in accordance with the Office, Shops and Railways Premises Act of 1963. With the objective of reducing energy consumption by 15 per cent. over a five-year period, heating management systems and energy efficient lighting are being installed in a rolling programme and as part of the refurbishment of the main building. A staff awareness campaign has been launched and is to be intensified.

Chile

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Government of Chile concerning the visit on 18 May of General Pinochet; what information he has about the nature and purpose of the visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We made known to the Chilean Government our reservations about this visit which, they told us, would be a private one. On 18 May, at the invitation of Royal Ordnance, General Pinochet visited their premises at Hatfield and Aylesbury. Neither Ministers nor officials had contact with General Pinochet.

Security Council Resolution 687

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the information gathered by the United Nations investigation commission in Iraq, established in pursuance of United Nations Security Council resolution 687, will be published by either the United Nations or member Governments involved in the operations to liberate Kuwait.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not yet aware of any arrangements to publish information arising from inspections by the special commission or the International Atomic Energy Agency.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the GDP per head in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. John Maples: GDP per head in Scotland and in Yorkshire and Humberside in 1989 is provisionally estimated at £7,021 and £6,649 respectively.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an analysis, comparable with table 5.7 of Cm 1520, showing *(a)* that local authority expenditure in Wales which falls outside expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales and *(b)* that local authority expenditure in Northern Ireland which falls outside expenditure within the responsibilty of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested for local authority expenditure in Wales, consistent with that given in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement (Cm 1520), is given in the table below. All local authority expenditure in Northern Ireland falls within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Local authority expenditure in Wales which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales by economic category

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Pay	175	189	209	222	251	329
Other current expenditure on goods and services	28	29	34	42	43	
Current grants to persons	212	229	232	254	273	301
Net capital expenditure on assets	10	10	13	12	17	7
Total	426	458	488	531	585	638

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an analysis, comparable with table 5.8 of Cm 1520, showing that local authority expenditure in *(a)* Scotland which falls outside expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland, *(b)* Wales which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested for local authority current expenditure in Scotland and Wales, consistent with that given in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement (Cm 1520), is given in the tables. All local authority expenditure within Northern Ireland falls within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Local authority current expenditure in Scotland which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland by function

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	3	4	4	3	3	8
Trade, industry, energy and employment	9	9	9	15	13	15
Social security	299	349	404	419	476	553
Total	311	362	417	437	492	576

Local authority current expenditure in Wales which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales by function

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	1	1	1	1	1	1
Trade, industry, energy and employment	7	7	8	9	9	10
Law, order and protective services	189	204	225	246	275	304
Education	45	46	49	53	60	75
Social security	174	190	192	209	222	239
Total	416	448	475	518	568	631

Incomes

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average income in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Maples: Household income per head in Scotland and Yorkshire and Humberside in 1989 is provisionally estimated at £6,890 and £6,583 respectively. Region and county income statistics are published today 23 May in the April issue of *Economic Trends*.

Government Expenditure

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables showing, for the years since 1961, identifiable general Government expenditure by function in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of United Kingdom total identifiable general Government expenditure, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as an index, United Kingdom identifiable general Government expenditure = G100.

Mr. Mellor: Data on identifiable general Government expenditure by function and territory in the years 1985-86 to 1989-90 are given in appendix E of the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement (Cm. 1520). Corresponding data for earlier years are not readily available on a directly comparable basis with these figures.

Manufacturing Output

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing the value of total manufacturing output in the United Kingdom in each year since 1975 at constant 1975 prices.

Mr. Maples: Changes in the level of output of manufacturing industry at constant prices are best measured by the index of manufacturing production based on 1985 prices. Annual figures from 1975 are given in the following table.

Index of Manufacturing production (1985 = 100)

Year	Index
1975	101·6
1976	103·5
1977	105·5

Year	Index
1978	106·1
1979	106·0
1980	96·8
1981	91·0
1982	91·2
1983	93·8
1984	97·4
1985	100·0
1986	101·3
1987	106·6
1988	114·2
1989	119·0
1990	118·3

Inflation

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list showing the latest available figures for the rate of inflation in each OECD member country.

Mr. Maples: The following table gives the information:

Consumer price indices—annual percentage changes April 1991 unless stated

	Per cent
Australia (Q1, 1991)	4·9
Austria (March)	3·5
Belgium	2·9
Canada	6·3
Denmark	2·6
Finland (March)	4·8
France	3·2
Germany (West)	2·8
Greece	21·5
Iceland (March)	5·6
Ireland (Q1, 1991)	2·5
Italy	6·9
Japan (March)	4·0
Luxembourg	2·9
Netherlands	2·6
New Zealand (Q1, 1991)	4·5
Norway (March)	3·6
Portugal	11·8
Spain	5·9
Sweden (March)	10·7
Switzerland (March)	5·8
Turkey (March)	62·4
United Kingdom	6·4
United States	4·9

Fishing Boats

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the net effect on taxation revenue by way of *(a)* corporation tax and *(b)* capital gains tax of the Government's proposed decommissioning scheme for fishing trawlers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply. There are no plans to introduce a Government-funded decommissioning scheme, but I have said that, if industry representatives could produce an industry funded scheme which offered long-term conservation benefits, the Government would consider it.

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a table summarising the results for 1989-90 of the annual exercise conducted according to the Northern Ireland (Share of United Kingdom Taxes) Regulations 1975, as amended, using, where relevant, the categories of tables 3.14 and 3.15 of Financial Statistics, identifying for each which of methods 3(1) and 3(2) have been used and separately identifying gross revenues and revenues net of collection costs;

(2) if he will place in the Library *(a)* a technical explanation of the methodology adopted and of the difficulties encountered in its application, *(b)* a note indicating the number of years for which the exercise required by the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 and its predecessors has been undertaken in broadly comparable form and *(c)* a reconciliation, if necessary, between the figures provided above Northern Ireland's attributed share of United Kingdom taxes as published in Cm 1123.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* Payments into the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in 1989-90 in respect of Northern Ireland's attributed share of United Kingdom taxes comprised £2,578 million for taxes collected in 1989-90 and £105 million for adjustments to payments in previous years—as published in Cm 1123. Adjustments to the 1989-90 payment are not yet available. I have placed details of the breakdown and other information requested in the Library.

HEALTH

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the sums which his Department will transmit to regional health authorities in the current financial year, if he will publish a table showing the increases and decreases in real terms in the allocation of such hospital and health service funding in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The total amount available for net revenue spending on hospital, community health, family health and related services in 1991-92 is £17·96 billion. Of this, the main population based allocation for the 14 regional health authorities (RHAs) is £14·85 billion. RHAs will also receive special allocations such as the service increment for teaching, and increased support for centrally financed initiatives such as the AIDS programe, project 2000 and 100 consultants.

The table shows the main population based allocations for the 14 RHAs over the past 10 years. These are given at current cash levels and at 1991-92 cash levels using the GDP deflator, and demonstrate a real term increase over the period of 23 per cent.

Year	Allocation cash	Allocation 1990-91 cash levels
1982-83	7,281,698	12,113,906
1983-84	8,166,250	12,985,562
1984-85	8,454,184	12,793,463
1985-86	9,049,056	12,985,938
1986-87	9,615,451	13,342,496
1987-88	10,215,098	13,441,945
1988-89	11,276,275	13,828,885
1989-90	12,330,178	14,215,832
1990-91	13,377,893	14,314,346
1991-92	14,853,676	14,853,676

Note: To allow for consistency of comparison the allocations shown above exclude additional allocations made in-year such as the cost of review body pay awards.

Cottage Hospitals

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cottage hospitals have been closed in England in the last five years; and what provisions are made for the closure of these units and the disposal of hospital buildings and property.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not held centrally in the form requested. The available information on acute, mainly acute and partly acute hospitals with fewer than 50 beds is given in the table.

National Health Service acute, mainly acute and partly acute hospitals with less than 50 beds, England

Year	Number
1985	255
1986	246
1987-88	[1]n/a
1988-89	232
1989-90	221

[1] In 1987-88 the method of collecting statistics changed. The detailed analysis to provide these figures was not possible because of problems with data quality of some site-level returns.

Cottage hospitals are subject to the same rules for consultation on closure as other hospitals. A copy of a guidance booklet, "Consultation and Involving the Consumer", giving advice on this was issued last year, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

The disposal of hospital buildings and property is a matter for health authorities.

Ativan

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in checking the drug Ativan for harmful side effects and addictiveness.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: When the licensing of medicinal products was introduced in the United Kingdom the drug Ativan was already on the market and was therefore given a licence of right. The quality, safety and efficacy was subsequently examined in order that a reviewed product licence might be granted.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) carefully monitors reports of adverse reactions to all licensed medicinal products and advises the Licensing Authority when action is required in relation to specific safety issues. The problem of addiction with benzodiazepines, the group of drugs with similar properties to Ativan, has been recognised for a number of years. This problem has been drawn to the attention of the medical profession on a number of occasions and the CSM has recommended restrictions in the use of these substances. The CSM continues to monitor this situation.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department first received evidence of the harmful side effects, including addictiveness, from the drug Ativan; and what action was taken to end its availability on prescription.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) operates a yellow card scheme for physicians to report suspected adverse reactions to drugs. Under the scheme, the CSM received the first report of a suspected reaction to Ativan in November 1973. The first report for drug dependence was received in May 1977. It is important to recognise that the report of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. Ativan remains available on prescription in the NHS under its non-proprietary name.

HIV (Irish Republic)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many citizens of the Irish Republic are receiving treatment in respect of HIV or AIDS within the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his statement of 14 May, *Official Report*, column 174, if he will arrange to place in the Library full information gathered as a result of the monitoring exercise of health trusts to which he referred.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. As I made clear at the time, this preliminary information gathered as part of the routine monitoring of NHS trusts by the NHS management executive may well change from week to week. It is possible that the information about job prospects at Guy's and Lewisham NHS trust given to the Select Committee by its chief executive on 22 May means that it has already been overtaken, and it is more likely that there will be about as many jobs created as lost in the 57 first wave trusts.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department and the NHS management executive have to provide managerial and management development assistance to the Guy's and North Lewisham hospital trust.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Guy's and Lewisham hospitals national health service trust will continue to be eligible to apply for funding from central initiatives such as resource management. We have no plans to provide any other managerial or management development assistance to the NHS trust. Each NHS trust is responsible for its own management development.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual salary for 1990-91 for the district general manager of each of the predecessor district health authorities of NHS trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Details of payments awarded to individual national health service employees are a confidential matter between employer and employee. District general managers are paid on performance-linked contracts. The rates payable from 1 September 1990 were within the ranges of:

DGM 1 £43,940 to £63,470
DGM 2 £41,500 to £59,950
DGM 3 £37,980 to £55,060

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what upper limit he will place on the proportion of hospitals eligible to achieve trust status, provided each hospital complies with his current criteria for it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no compulsion to apply for trust status: it is a decision to be taken by each

unit independently. We have no intention of limiting the numbers of units which can become trusts other than by rejecting applications where the selection criteria are not fulfilled.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the guidance which has been given to the chairmen and chief executives of NHS trusts with regard to their making political statements or comments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No such guidance has been issued.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek powers to prevent health service trusts from entering commercial activity other than those related to matters of direct relevance to health; and if any trusts have commenced engagement in such activity.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Powers, which are already available to health authorities, were extended to trusts to enable them to enter into commercial activities, for the purpose of generating additional income, provided that these activities do not adversely affect or reduce services to national health service patients; that profits are reinvested back into the health service and that the scheme does not conflict with national policy or cause ethical or legal problems.

It is for the trusts themselves to determine how to use these powers to the benefit of patients.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what salaries or other emoluments are paid to the doctors of those NHS trusts which have been established within south Yorkshire.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. The salaries of doctors of national health ervice trusts and those of other staff are a matter for the trust board. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the NHS trusts concerned for details.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish details of the originating debt, including its division between public dividend capital and interest bearing debt, of each of the national health service trusts.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 20 May 1991]*: The originating capital debt for national health service trusts will be equal to the value of the net assets transferred to the trusts on 1 April 1991, which will be determined when the accounts of the relevant health authorities have been prepared and audited. At that stage an order will be made by statutory instrument under section 9 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 setting out the composition and terms of the originating capital debt.

Census

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions were given to census enumerators in Wales with regard to making freely available to each household a set of census forms in the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Census enumerators were instructed to offer all households in Wales the choice of a Welsh or English form as part of the form delivery procedure. Regrettably, reports were received that some enumerators had not done so. Special instructions were therefore issued to ensure that when the enumerator called back to collect completed forms, anyone who had not been offered a Welsh form could obtain one from the enumerator who would call back later to collect it when completed. All English language household forms used in Wales contained a prominent note enabling people who wanted a Welsh language form to get one by telephoning the census inquiry number.

I hope that these measures have ensured that everyone in Wales who wanted to use a Welsh form was able to do so.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the forms used at the recent census were printed in the Welsh language.

Mr. Dorrell: All public census forms for issue in Wales were available in both Welsh and English; 200,000 household forms, 90,000 individual forms, and 10,000 listing forms for use in communal establishments were printed in Welsh. Figures are not yet available on how many were used.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints he has received arising from the administration of the recent census, arising from *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland, respectively; and if he will list the main grounds of complaint in each country.

Mr. Dorrell: We received 73 letters between 1 April and 21 May from right hon. and hon. Members in England and Wales conveying comments from constituents on aspects of the census. The Registrar General is replying to 69 other letters from right hon. and hon. Members who have written to him or whose letters have been forwarded to him from Ministers in other Departments. No analysis of the different aspects of the census mentioned in the correspondence is available yet.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland, is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Resource Management Initiative

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total level of expenditure on the resource management initiative.

Mr. Waldegrave: At 31 March 1991, the Department had made available £97·6 million of central funds to support the resource management initiative and the subsequent resource management programme. Regional and district health authorities and individual hospitals have provided some additional funding for individual projects.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the joint evaluation of the resource management initiative by the NHS management executive and the joint consultants committee.

Mr. Waldegrave: Discussions between the NHS management executive and the joint consultants committee in 1989 and 1990 concluded that a formal full-scale joint evaluation of the resource management initiative was

impracticable. The NHS management executive has taken account of evidence from the evaluation of resource management commissioned from Brunel university and other sources in reaching decisions to extend the resource management programme. The joint consultants committee issued its own guidance on hospital management arrangements in June 1990.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been undertaken by his Department and by consultants retained by his Department on the effectiveness of the resource management initiative; and what have been the conclusions of this work.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department commissioned Brunel university to undertake an evaluation of resource management as demonstrated at the six acute pilot sites included in the initial resource management initiative. The evaluation began in 1988 and was completed at the end of 1990. The final report, "The Brunel University evaluation of Resource Management", a copy of which will be placed in the Library, concluded that progress in implementing resource management at the pilot sites has been slower than originally anticipated, but that substantial progress has been made and continues to be made at each of the sites. The report also suggested that the pilot sites have provided valuable lessons for the future development of resource management. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total level of HCHS net capital expenditure in *(a)* cash, *(b)* constant prices adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator and *(c)* constant prices adjusted by the changes in input unit costs in the years (1) 1974-75 to 1978-79 and (2) 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information requested is given in the table. In order to give a complete picture of capital investment in the national health service, spending financed through proceeds of land and property is also shown.

HCHS Capital since 1974-75

	Public expenditure		*Capital receipts (mainly land sales)*		*Total Expenditure*		*Total at 1990-91 prices adjusted: by the GDP deflator*		*for the change in input unit costs*	
	A	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
1974-75	—	243	—	—	—	243	—	1,101	—	1,157
1975-76	—	327	—	—	—	327	—	1,181	—	1,192
1976-77	—	356	—	—	—	356	—	1,132	—	1.159
1977-78	—	315	—	—	—	315	—	881	—	897
1978-79	—	358	—	8	—	366	—	923	—	933
1979-80	—	395	—	10	—	405	—	876	—	855
1980-81	—	540	—	16	—	556	—	1,016	—	933
1981-82	—	651	—	20	—	671	—	1,118	—	1,091
1982-83	—	682	—	19	—	701	—	1,091	—	1,122
1983-84	—	692	—	33	—	725	—	1,078	—	1,137
1984-85	—	767	—	50	—	817	—	1,156	—	1,230
1985-86	899	803	85	85	985	888	1,322	1,192	1,400	1,262
1986-87	915	—	149	—	1,064	—	1,380	—	1,441	—
1987-88	914	—	201	—	1,115	—	1,373	—	1,436	—
1988-89	922	—	279	—	1,201	—	1,377	—	1,462	—
1989-90	1,206	—	232	—	1,438	—	1,549	—	1,603	—
1990-91	1,458	—	220	—	1,678	—	1,678	—	1,678	—

Because of transfers between programmes it is not possible to produce a consistent run of figures over the whole period. Figures in Presentation A have been adjusted to reflect the transfer to HCHS of FHS Administration, Disablement Services Authority and FHS cash limited spending. The figures in Presentation B do not reflect these transfers and are therefore not comparable with those for later years.

NHS (Waiting Times)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is kept by the NHS on the length of time NHS staff at *(a)* doctor level and *(b)* other levels wait for various types of operation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not collected on waiting time by occupational group.

Sign Language Interpreters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column *423*, to the hon. Member for Don Valley, if he will make it his policy to collect information centrally in respect of health authorities that provide British sign language interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing patients.

Mr. Dorrell: It is up to providers of health services to make arrangements locally to assist communication with patients with hearing impairment. We see no useful purpose in collecting information centrally on these arrangements.

Dentists (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists to date in the Doncaster area have withdrawn from the national health service since the introduction of the new dental contracts.

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1 October 1990, the date the new dental contract was introduced, and 30 April 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, four dentists withdrew from Doncaster family health services authority's dental list, out of a total of 85. Two have joined dental lists in other areas. During the same period the names of 11 dentists have been added to Doncaster's dental list.

Intestinal Cancer

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund the introduction of a national screening system for the early detection of intestinal cancer via occult foetal blood tests.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It would be premature to consider this before we know the outcome of a study, which the Department and the Medical Research Council are currently funding, to evaluate screening for colorectal cancer.

Discharged Patients

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the last 12 months for each *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority in England and Wales, the number of national health service patients who have been discharged from national health service hospitals, and who within three months required subsequent hospitalisation for (i) the same complaint or (ii) a different but related complaint.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

World No Tobacco Day

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to mark World No Tobacco Day on 31 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The main United Kingdom event in this field, on which efforts are concentrated, is our own long established and successful No Smoking Day. We recognise, however, the importance of World No Tobacco Day, particularly in those countries which do not organise their own national event and we try to give it suitable recognition.

This year the Health Education Authority (HEA) will be supplying each health education unit and environmental health unit in England with question and answer booklets on passive smoking together with posters, stickers and ideas for action.

The HEA is also co-operating with *Taxi* magazine in a promotion designed to encourage smoke-free cabs.

Dental Technicians

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions were taken by the General Dental Council against dental technicians during the year 1990 for illegal practice of dentistry in the provision of dentures; and what was their outcome.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand from the General Dental Council that one dental technician was prosecuted during 1990 for practising dentistry illegally. The defendant pleaded guilty to three separate charges and was fined £750 on each count and ordered to pay costs of £200.

Conisbrough Hospital, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the notification by the chairman of Doncaster health authority of the intended closure of Conisbrough hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that Doncaster health authority is due to consult locally on the proposed closure of Conisbrough hospital at the end of May. If after full and public consultation the community health council contests the proposed closure, it will be put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a decision.

Budgeting and Charging (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made with the chairman of Doncaster health authority concerning a smoothing mechanism operating after 1 April in respect of the new budgeting system and the new charging system for cross-border flows of patients to hospitals and clinics.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: District health authorities as commissioners of health services consulted general practitioners in their areas before making contracts with hospital and other providers to reflect their views and existing referral patterns. They are also holding cash reserves for patients referred by general practitioners outside the contractual framework.

Junior Hospital Doctors

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on what progress has been achieved in reducing the hours worked by junior hospital doctors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The ministerial group on junior doctors' hours, which I chair, is making good progress in implementing the heads of agreement on junior doctors' hours signed in December last year, a copy of which is available in the Library. Task forces have been set up in every region and have already received guidance on the role they are to play in reducing the hours and improving the working conditions of doctors in training. Funding for an additional 200 consultant and 50 staff grade posts has been allocated to the regions, along with notice of 100 additional senior house officer posts to assist in the initiative. In conjunction with the profession, we hope to launch the full package of guidance outlined in the heads of agreement in the near future.

Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the latest date he has available, for each health authority in England and Wales *(a)* the number of nurses employed as (i) nursing assistants, (ii) enrolled nurses, (iii) staff nurses and (iv) charge nurses and *(b)* the numbers in absolute and percentage terms at which nurses are employed in each category; and what were the comparable figures five and 10 years ago.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Buerger's Disease

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Buerger's disease have been recorded in each of the last five years for which data are available; and in how many cases this has been given as the cause of death.

Mr. Dorrell: The only information held centrally which can be provided without incurring disproportionate cost is given in the table. This relates to the number of patients

treated in NHS hospitals in England where Thromboangiitis obliterans (Buerger's disease) has been recorded as the primary diagnosis.

Estimated numbers of discharges and deaths (1984-85) and ordinary and day case admissions (1987-88/1989-90) where main diagnosis was ICD 443.1: thromboangiitis obliterans (Buerger's disease) 443.1 Buerger's disease

Year	Number of in-patients
1984	93
1985	103
1987-88	143
1988-89	123
1989-90	114

Source: HIPE 1984-85 and HES 1987-88/1989-90. Data compiled by SM12A.

These numbers are provisional estimates based on incomplete data and may be subject to revision.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into the link between smoking and Buerger's disease; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the publicity given to the dangers of Buerger's disease from smoking.

Mr. Dorrell: We are not aware of any current research in this area. Buerger's disease is a rare form of peripheral vascular disease, the cause of which remains unknown, although a close association with the habitual use of tobacco, particularly cigarette smoking, is indisputable. The Health Education Authority is aware of the association between smoking and Buerger's disease and seeks to publicise this as part of its anti-smoking programmes, although other smoking-related diseases result in far higher levels of mortality and morbidity.

St. Charles Youth Treatment Centre

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's report on the St. Charles youth treatment centre in Brentwood, Essex; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Earlier this year, a young person made a number of serious complaints about aspects of treatment while at St. Charles youth treatment centre. These have been investigated on behalf of the Department by a team of independent experts. They have submitted their report. This contains confidential personal and medical information and cannot be made public. The Department is urgently considering the team's findings, and will make its conclusions public after the young person involved has been informed of the outcome. Any action required in the light of the team's findings will be taken with the utmost vigour.

Diabetics

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether cassette needles used by diabetics will be made available free of charge on the same basis as existing needles and syringes supplied for their needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health service supply arrangements for insulin pens and needles need to be considered together. Subject to our normal evaluation of individual brands, we would consider making pens and needles prescribable, as an alternative to syringes, provided that this can be done without additional cost. Discussions with suppliers are currently in progress.

Incontinence Aids

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* which regional health authorities have a policy of providing incontinence aids free to residents of private residential or nursing homes who have been referred by doctors or nurses and *(b)* which district health authorities do not provide incontinence aids free in the same circumstances.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Leeds General Infirmary

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will review the proposals made by the Leeds general infirmary hospital trust to increase the number of private beds at the Leeds general infirmary; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of private beds at the Leeds general infirmary and associated hospitals national health service trust is a matter for the management board. I understand from the management of the trust that there are no plans to increase the number of private beds.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he received the report of the independent experts examining the possibility of a link between the release of toxic gases from certain cot mattresses and sudden infant death syndrome; if he will give a date for its publication; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The report was given to the chief medical officer on 5 February, publication is imminent and the Department will then respond to the recommendations of the expert group.

General Practitioners

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he intends to take to ensure that non-fund-holding general practices in the city of Sheffield are able to place patients in hospitals outside the authority area, where required for the most appropriate patient care and speediest treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: General practitioners remain free to refer patients to hospitals outside their district boundaries. Indeed, the reforms offer improved arrangements to giving practical effect to this freedom.

Guidance, "Contracts for Health Services: Operational Principles", issued to the national health service on 29 September 1989, a copy of which is available in the Library, made it clear that district health authorities' objective should be to secure contracts which reflect the referral patterns local general practitioners prefer. There has been an unprecedented level of consultation between district health authorities and local general practitioners to achieve this. District health authorities are also holding reserves of funds for referrals where no contract has been secured in advance.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish general practitioner fund-holding contracts.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance to the National Health Service (EL(90)MB24, a copy of which is available in the Library) has made it clear that contracts for health services with both public and private providers should be made publicly available once they are signed.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given on the relationship between general practitioner fund-holding practices and community health councils regarding their health purchasing policies of such general practitioners.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The community health council has a statutory relationship with the district health authority which retains overall planning responsibility for the provision of health services to all residents, including those on the lists of fund-holding general practitioners.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the Far Lane general practitioner fund-holding practice in Sheffield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received one such representation from the Sheffield local medical committee, whom I met on Wednesday 22 May.

The Far Lane fund-holding practice in Sheffield has legitimately set up a company which is employing consultants to provide a range of services for patients. Regional health authorities are required to agree to such arrangements only where they constitute good value for money by comparison with the alternatives and meet the requisite quality standards for the provision of care. The Trent regional health authority has confirmed that it is content with the arrangements at this practice.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued concerning the use of general practitioner fund holders' premises for private practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No guidance has been issued specifically to fund holders. GPs, as independent contractors, are free to use as they like the premises which they own. The conditions for payments to GPs in respect of their surgery premises, are set out in the statement of fees and allowances.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the incidence for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease over the last 10 years in each standard cohort age range of onset of clinical symptoms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not available centrally. Accurate information on current and previous cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease should be forthcoming from the study being conducted by Dr. R. G. Will supported by the Department of Health. In the 1970s, the last time this analysis was undertaken, the peak age-specific incidence was for the 65 to 69 year age group and was 1·7 cases per million per year. Copies of Dr. Will's publication on this analysis will be placed in the Library.

Steroid Drugs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to the written answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *87*, to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, what progress has been made on deciding the timetable, agency and funding of the Government's proposed survey into the prevalence of the misuse of steroid drugs.

Mr. Dorrell: We have identified a research facility with the relevant expertise to carry out this survey and, subject to final contract negotiations, plan to conduct the survey in the autumn. We estimate that the survey will take approximately one year to complete.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Millisle Tourist Project

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any information about foul sewage discharge from Ballycopeland outlet going into the lagoon at the new Millisle tourist development project when there is a north wind and an incoming tide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Sewage effluent is discharged from the Ballycopeland outlet only on the outgoing tide as soon after high tide as possible and is thus carried away from the lagoon.

The Millisle tourist development project is the responsibility of Ards borough council and there have been no complaints from it or others about sewage entering the lagoon.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is satisfied with the condition of the beach near Drumfads road, Carrowdore, County Down; whether untreated raw sewage is being pumped out to the Irish sea near this location; whether an overspill flows down to Millisle; and if he will make a statement about foul sewage disposal at this location.

Mr. Needham: The bathing waters at Millisle are routinely monitored under, and comply with, the mandatory standards of the EC bathing water directive. Sewage is held in a retention tank on the shore at Ballywhiskin where it is screened before discharge to the sea on the ebb tide. There is no overspill flowing to Millisle. Sewage discharges to the sea are being examined in the context of the recent EC directive on municipal waste water treatment.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for a new sewage treatment plant for Millisle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Existing sewage treatment facilities at Millisle are being examined in the context of the recent EC directive on municipal waste water treatment.

Lands Tribunals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by how much the salaries of *(a)* the president and *(b)* the members of lands tribunals increased in the 10 years from 1 April 1982 to 1 April 1992 in cash and percentage terms; and what has been the percentage increase in the average industrial wage and in inflation during the same period.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Date of increase	*President £*	*Percentage increase*	*Member £*	*Percentage increase*
1 April 1982[1]	29,000	—	27,750	—
1 August 1983[1]	31,250	7·2	29,750	7·2
1 January 1984[1]	32,750	4·8	31,000	4·2
1 April 1984[1]	33,733	3·0	31,930	3·0
1 November 1984[1]	35,000	3·76	33,000	3·35
16 April 1986[2]	20,000	—	33,000	—
1 July 1986[2]	23,000	15·0	41,500	25·76
1 April 1987[2]	23,878	3·82	43,264	4·25
1 May 1987[1]	47,955	—	43,264	—
1 October 1987[1]	48,250	0·61	43,500	0·55
1 April 1988[1]	50,180	4·0	45,240	4·0
1 October 1988[1]	50,900	1·44	45,800	1·24
1 April 1989[1]	53,400	4·9	48,100	5·02
1 April 1990[1]	56,600	4·12	51,000	6·24
1 January 1991[1]	58,900	4·06	53,050	4·02
1 April 1991[1]	63,300	7·47	57,050	7·54
1 August 1991[1]	65,250	3·08	58,800	3·07
1 December 1991[1]	66,500	1·92	59,900	1·87
1 April 1992[1]	68,400	2·86	61,600	2·84

[1] The salary quoted for the President is per annum. The President in his role of County Court Judge is paid by the Northern Ireland Court Service whereas time spent on Lands Tribunal work is paid out of the Consolidated Fund on a pro-rata basis in relation to days worked.
[2] The post was filled in 1986-87 on a part-time basis (hence the reduced salary) but the postholder worked exclusively on Lands Tribunal work.

Average wage increases Northern Ireland

	Male	*Female*	*Average*	*Retail price index Great Britain*
1982	11·5	7·7	9·6	9·4
1983	6·4	11·0	8·7	4·0
1984	10·6	5·6	8·1	5·2
1985	5·0	8·8	6·9	6·8
1986	5·7	4·8	5·25	3·0
1987	9·4	7·2	8·3	4·4
1988	7·9	7·6	7·75	3·9
1989	7·3	13·3	10·3	8·0
1990	9·7	7·8	8·75	9·4
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not available.

Local Government Staff Commission

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the Secretary of the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland is leaving his post; and on what date his successor will take up the post.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland. I am advised by its chairman that the secretary will be leaving his post on 11 June 1991, but no decisions have yet been taken regarding the appointment of his successor.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date a chief executive will be appointed to the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland. I am advised by its chairman that interviews for the appointment of a chief executive will take place on 28 May 1991. At this stage, therefore, it is not possible to say on what date a new chief executive will take up appointment.

Ultach Trust

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the objectives that were laid down by the Northern Ireland Office as conditions for funding the Ultach trust; and whether these objectives define the relationship between the Ultach trust and Glor na nGael's.

Dr. Mawhinney: The objectives of Government funding for the Ultach trust are to widen the appreciation of the contribution that the Irish language has made to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland, to increase knowledge of the language throughout the community and to assist in the provision of written and oral material to promote the wider use of the language.

All agreements between the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Ultach trust are subject to conditions designed to ensure that the funding provided is used in a manner and for the purposes agreed by the parties. This includes a standard provision which gives effect to the policy reflected in the parliamentary reply of 27 June 1985 by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, *Official Report*, Vol. 81, column *451*.

Glor na nGael

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what consideration he has given to the independent audit of Belfast Glor na nGael's accounts; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what are the procedures by which charitable street collections are authorised in Northern Ireland; and whether these procedures were fully complied with for the first Irish language collection undertaken by Glor na nGael in Belfast on 10 October 1990;

(3) when the decision was made to withdraw funds from Glor na nGael.

Dr. Mawhinney: These matters are within the purview of current proceedings before the High Court in Northern Ireland and further comment by me at this stage would not be appropriate.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to ensure that the development of Irish language resources in the community will not suffer as a result of the withdrawal of funds from Glor Na nGael.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government recognise the interest and importance which many people attach to the Irish language and culture, and have a policy of active support for Irish language projects through their cultural traditions programme and other programmes, such as the action for community employment scheme and the Belfast action teams initiative. Overall Government spending on the Irish language has increased from approximately £88,000 in 1985-86 to an expected level considerably in excess of £700,000 in 1991-92. This does not take into account the very substantial annual amount spent in schools and colleges of further education. The Government will continue to support efforts to increase awareness and appreciation of the language as part of the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland.

Grants (Vetting)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details as to which section of the Northern Ireland civil service is responsible for implementing the vetting policy for grants, announced on 27 June 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: Decisions under the policy announced on 27 June 1985 are taken by my right hon. Friend and are given effect through all Departments under his control.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the content and purpose of the instructions issued to Departments and public bodies with regard to organisations from whom funds have been withdrawn as a result of the vetting policy on grants announced on 27 June 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: Instructions on this matter are internal to Government, but the purpose is to ensure that decisions taken under the policy announced on 27 June 1985 are given effect.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of all instances where public funds have been withdrawn from Northern Ireland organisations under the vetting policy for grants announced on 27 June 1985; how many of the decisions were appealed; and what was the result of each appeal.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to his earlier question on 19 December 1990, *Official Report*, Vol. 183, c. *160*.

Western Health and Social Services Board

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the new management structure of the Western health and social services board, how many who are deemed to be Protestants have been appointed.

Mr. Hanley: Under the Fair Employment (N.I.) Acts 1976 and 1989, the Western health and social services board, as a specified public authority, carries direct responsibility for providing equality of opportunity for all job applicants and for its employees. The board has an equal opportunity policy and submits monitoring returns to the Fair Employment Commission as required by the legislation.

In view of the board's statutory responsibilities, I do not consider it appropriate to provide the information requested. However, the board is prepared to meet with the hon. Member on this matter.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action the Western health and social services board is taking under its fair employment policy to ensure a fair representation between Roman Catholics and Protestants on its psychiatric unit of management.

Mr. Hanley: The Western health and social services board has an equal opportunity policy and has developed procedures for the implementation and monitoring of equality of opportunity which are in line with the recommendations in the code of practice on fair employment. The board seeks to ensure that vacancies are advertised in newspapers accessible by both communities, that shortlisting criteria are not unlawfully discriminatory and that appointments are made in accordance with the health and personal social services selection and appointment procedures which are the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services. It is the board's policy that all appointments should be made on the basis of merit and this policy is applied consistently in all areas including the board's area mental health unit.

Social Fund

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total monthly budget allocated under the social fund to each district office of the Department of Health and Social Services in each month since April 1988.

Mr. Hanley: Social fund budgets are allocated to offices for a full year and not on a monthly basis. Information on the annual amounts allocated to each district office from 1 April 1991 and individual offices in previous years is available in the Library.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure from the social fund by each district office of the Department of Health and Social Services in each month since April 1988.

Mr. Hanley: Details of each month's expenditure for the district offices from 1 April 1991 and individual social security offices for previous years is available in the Library.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions the monthly social fund budgets of each district office of the Department of Health and Social Services were underspent at the end of each month since April 1988.

Mr. Hanley: Social fund budgets are allocated for a full year, April to March, therefore the question of an underspend does not arise until the end of the financial year. Details of amounts remaining in each office's budget at the year end are available in the Library.

Community Care Grant

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many community care grant applications were processed by each district office of the Department of Health and Social Services in each month since April 1988; and how many applications were *(a)* successful, *(b)* successful on appeal and *(c)* rejected.

Mr. Hanley: Information about the number of community care grants processed each month by each of the district offices from 1 April 1991 and the individual social security offices is available in the Library. The number of applications refused can be obtained from those figures.

Community care grants are discretionary awards and there is no right of appeal against these. Dissatisfied applicants can, however, apply for a review to the social fund officer who made the original decision and if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of this review they can request a review by the social fund inspector. The SFI acts independently of the Department. Details of the number of decisions revised on review by each social security office for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 is shown in the table. Information about the number of cases substituted on review by the SFI is compiled each month by the Social Fund Commissioner's Office for Northern Ireland as a whole, and is available in the Library. It should be recognised that not all cases revised by the SSO or substituted by the SFI on review will be to the applicant's benefit.

Community care grants—Decisions revised

Social Security office	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Andersonstown	22	97	185
Antrim	8	65	48
Armagh	10	14	29
Ballymena	7	40	38
Ballymoney	4	17	15
Ballynahinch	6	28	11
Banbridge	5	14	22
Bangor	6	6	16
Carrickfergus	3	20	26
Coleraine	6	22	56
Cookstown	24	33	31
Corporation Street	39	139	182
Downpatrick	14	33	42
Dungannon	14	75	55
Enniskillen	8	42	56
Falls	19	126	84
Holywood Road	22	101	67
Kilkeel	4	3	3
Knockbreda	24	47	44
Larne	7	21	34
Limavady	6	21	10
Lisburn	19	57	103
Londonderry	38	352	361
Lurgan	22	100	109
Magherafelt	12	14	12
Newcastle	3	11	15
Newry	19	103	144
Newtownabbey	9	45	39
Newtownards	0	4	7
Omagh	5	34	30
Portadown	3	21	15
Shaftesbury Square	33	123	100
Shankill	34	115	249
Strabane	8	46	102
Total	463	1,989	2,340

Rural Development

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the progress that has been made since the establishment of the inter-departmental committee on rural development.

Mr. Hanley: Since taking on ministerial responsibility for rural development in Northern Ireland, I have set up within the Department of Agriculture a new rural development division to take forward the work of establishing the new structures announced at the time.

I was pleased to be able to announce recently the appointment of Mr. Jimmy Armstrong as the executive chairman-designate for the proposed formation of the Rural Development Council and have asked him to prepare a draft constitution. I have also decided that a council of about 15 members could represent a wide range of rural and other relevant interests. I shall shortly be

seeking the assistance of appropriate organisations to help to identify potential members who might be able to make a personal contribution to the work of the council.

Arrangements are also under way to select from the wider public service a small team of area co-ordinators who will establish local networks of statutory agencies to co-ordinate and integrate responses to locally developed community regeneration plans.

I am aiming to have the next structures fully operational by the autumn.

LEADER Programme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the progress that has been made to date in the attraction of funds from the European Community's LEADER programme, and details of any future developments planned for LEADER-funded projects in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Northern Ireland, as the United Kingdom's only objective 1 region, has been accorded an indicative LEADER allocation of 2·8 million ecu. This is disappointingly low, given that the closest contact has been maintained with the Commission throughout the developmental stages of this initiative to ensure the greatest possible compatibility between LEADER and the new rural development structures being established in Northern Ireland.

However, the Commission has confirmed that the indicative allocations may be revised to take account of the quality of the programmes presented. Accordingly I am considering with officials how best to maximise the Northern Ireland allocation under the initiative. I will be making a statement shortly about the arrangements for implementing the LEADER programme in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Northern Ireland electricity service concerning the salary increase proposed by the chief executive of the service.

Mr. Needham: None. This is a matter in the first instance for the chairman of NIE who is then required to seek the approval of the Department of Economic Development.

Nationalists

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nationalist people in the Six Counties have been arrested under the emergency powers Act and prevention of terrorism Act since 1973; how many were charged and how many of those charged were convicted.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Republic of Ireland (Government Talks)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what allowances and expenses will be paid to the representatives of the political parties participating in talks with the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and where these talks will be held.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 14 May 1991]:* On the days when meetings of the political parties participating in talks with the Government of the Republic of Ireland take place in the United Kingdom, allowances will continue to be payable on the basis detailed in the reply which I gave to the right hon. Gentleman's question on 14 May 1991, *Official Report*, Vol. 191, column *126*. Other arrangements may be needed for the days on which the talks take place outside the United Kingdom.

I expect that the opening meeting of this strand of talks will be held in London, that the bulk of substantive exchanges will take place in Northern Ireland with plenary meetings being held in Parliament buildings, and that there will be a meeting in Dublin towards the end of June.

DEFENCE

Missiles and Nuclear Shells

Mr. Richmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will withdraw *(a)* SCRAM-A air-launched missiles and *(b)* W79 nuclear artillery shells from bases in the United Kingdom and British bases in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on the deployment of nuclear weapons.

The Gulf

Mr. Richmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department received the United States military's final draft report of its inquiry into the friendly fire incident on 26 February in the Gulf; if a copy will be placed in the Library; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to publish the report into the friendly fire incident of 26 February; and if a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 16 May at columns *272-74*.

Smoking

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the percentage of service personnel who smoke.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No service-wide assessment has been made, although a sample survey in 1989 among 4,000 adult male personnel found that 35 per cent. were cigarette smokers and a further 3·6 per cent. were cigar or pipe smokers.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to discourage smoking in the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence gives wide publicity to the harmful effects of smoking, by way of publishing and displaying anti-smoking literature and posters in defence establishments. Furthermore, it is official policy to discourage smoking on Ministry of Defence premises. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) announced in the House on 5 December 1988, the price of "Blue Liners", the specially produced low-priced cigarettes and tobacco

available to Royal Navy personnel serving in United Kingdom shore establishments, has been increased progressively and the concession will cease altogether in December 1991.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's forecast of United Kingdom defence expenditure for the next three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Defence expenditure in 1991-92 is expected to be around £24·4 billion. This exceeds the supply estimates by some £1·5 billion. Supplementary estimates to provide for this additional Gulf-related expenditure will be presented in due course. Cash plans thereafter are for £23·35 billion in 1992-93 and £23·39 billion in 1993-94, as set out in Cm. 1501.

Military Expenditure

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact of reduced military expenditure on the economy of south-west England.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is too early to say what effect the revised defence programme emerging from "Options for Change" will have on military expenditure in particular regions.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain a copy of the conclusions of the Bristol polytechnic study on the impact of reduced military expenditure on the economy of south-west England for his departmental library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Tornado Exercises, Alaska

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been made or are under discussion with the United States of America to enable Tornado aircraft to exercise in Alaska.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Tornado GR1 aircraft deployed to Alaska for a training exercise in June 1990, and the possibility of a further such exercise, is under discussion with the United States authorities.

RAF Honington

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters and single men's quarters at present are occupied at RAF Honington; and how many airmen stationed there have their own houses in the community.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At RAF Honington and its associated sites, 595 married quarters are occupied and 780 single personnel are living on base. In addition, 393 married personnel own houses in the local area and some 113 single personnel live in private housing either as tenants or owner-occupiers.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Defence organisations currently operating as "next steps" agencies are as follows:

	When launched
Executive agencies	
Meteorological Office	April 1990
Defence Research Agency	April 1991
Defence support agencies	
Hydrographic Office	April 1990
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	April 1991
Directorate General Defence Accounts	April 1991
Military Survey	April 1991
RAF Maintenance Group	April 1991
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)	April 1991

We plan to move ahead as quickly as possible with the identification and establishment of further agencies in the defence support area. This work will take into account developments in the structure and organisation of the services and the Ministry of Defence as a result of the continuing work on the broad proposals on "Options for Change" which were announced last July.

Submarines, Irish Channel

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the Royal Navy searched and investigated the reported siting of a Soviet Victor III class submarine off the east Antrim coast on 14 May;

(2) if he will make a statement regarding the presence of a foreign submarine approximately two miles off the east Antrim coast on Tuesday 14 May at approximately 1.20 pm.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There were no submarines, United Kingdom or foreign, on the surface off the east Antrim coast at the time in question.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken to protect shipping and fishermen from risk of activity of foreign submarines between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy is investigating whether the successful firth of Clyde dived submarine movement notification scheme can be extended to other United Kingdom territorial waters. Additionally, work continues to assist with the development of net pinger devices to make fishing nets more easily detectable to dived submarines.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British submarine surfaced off the east Antrim coast on 14 May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

RAF Training

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to awarding contracts to private firms for the provision of Royal Air Force maintenance training.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 300 Royal Air Force maintenance training courses have been put out to contract. We will continue to seek opportunities to extend this practice where it is cost-effective to do so.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to awarding contracts to private firms for the provision of basic Royal Air Force flying training.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The RAF has already embarked on major contractorisation at its flying training stations, at this stage concentrating on engineering, supply and domestic tasks which directly support flying training. A similar approach has been adopted with university air squadrons and air experience flights which provide a major source of trainee pilots for the RAF. We are currently examining the potential for contracting out the elementary flying task.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to awarding contracts to private firms for the provision of Royal Air Force apprentice training.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following a fundamental review of training in 1989, it has been decided to discontinue Royal Air Force apprentice training and the last tranche of service apprentices will graduate in July 1993. This will not affect the training of civilian apprentices by the Royal Air Force civilian technical training schools (CTTS). Some 50 per cent. of their training will, as at present, continue to be provided through local technical colleges and colleges of further education.

MOD Properties

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the number of defence domestic properties there are throughout the United Kingdom and *(b)* the number unoccupied at the present time; indicating how many have been unoccupied for six months, one year, two years and for longer than two years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not maintained in the precise form requested. As at 31 March 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, the total stock of service married quarters in the United Kingdom was 73,462 of which 10,111 were vacant; 7,707 had been vacant for less than one year, 1,104 for one to two years and 1,300 for over two years. In addition, the Ministry of Defence owned 1,573 civilian houses, of which 170 were vacant; 57 had been vacant for under six months and 113 for six months or more.

Many of these vacant properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already attached to service families who were due to move in shortly and others were being considered for disposal. In addition 1,864 dwellings were in the process of being sold.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the cost of repairing welding defects in the A91 building at the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston; and what effect this has had on training programmes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The problem discovered during the early stages of commissioning in the A91 building is one of corrosion on pipework and vessels. A detailed technical investigation into the cause and extent of the problem has not yet been completed so we are not in a position to make decisions about what work is needed to rectify the problem. We do not expect this problem to have any adverse effect on the Trident warhead programme. The training schedules of a small number of the future A91 operators have been revised while the problem is being investigated.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to rectify the defect in the installation of supports to the Phoenix system for ductwork on systems other than zone 1 and in the roof spaces above the first floor laboratories in the A90 building at Aldermaston; what system was charged for by the contractors; what steps he is taking to recover moneys from the contractor; and whether he is instigating any criminal or civil proceedings for overcharging, for product substitution or for fraud.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The use of Phoenix supports in A90, in areas beyond zone 1, was approved by the design authority for the building wherever they were fit for the purpose specified. Subsequently none has been found to be defective or inappropriate and none has had to be removed. The supplier charged and was paid for the materials used in the construction. The question of recovery of moneys or the instigation of any criminal or civil proceedings for overcharging has not arisen.

Royal Air Force Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of Royal Air Force Finningley.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Air Force Finningley is principally a flying training station. No decisions have been taken to change that role.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by year for the past 10 years, the amount of night flying that has taken place at Royal Air Force Finningley for *(a)* training purposes and *(b)* other reasons; and how much has taken place to date for 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The numbers of hours of night flying by aircraft normally based at RAF Finningley for the years in question were as follows:

	Hours
1981	1,189
1982	1,112
1983	847
1984	706
1985	480
1986	716
1987	850
1988	626
1989	870
1990	1,281

Note: The figure for 1991, to date, is 461 hours.

Most of this flying took place away from RAF Finningley. Nearly all was for training purposes.

VIPER Microprocessor

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to accept full responsibility for any damage, injury or death attributable to errors in

the design of the VIPER—verifiable integrated processor for enhanced reliability—microprocessor where it is used in safety-critical computer systems controlled by his Department;

(2) what steps his Department has taken with regard to the use of the VIPER microprocessor in safety-critical computer systems controlled by his Department in response to questions as to its design and safety of operation raised in reports published by researchers employed by his Department at the university of Cambridge;

(3) what assessment he has made of the consequences of his Department's premature announcements as to the reliability of the VIPER microprocessor and its premature market launch through commercial licensees appointed by his Department;

(4) what steps his Department is taking to discourage the use of the VIPER microprocessor in civil safety-critical computer systems.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The VIPER microchip was designed to a formal mathematical specification. There is debate among theoreticians about the extent to which VIPER can be said to be "proved" in a formal mathematical sense, but this should not be allowed to undermine the importance of the VIPER achievement: it was the first microchip to be designed to a formal mathematical specification; it was verified by the best methods available; and its design has been more rigorously documented and tested than that of any other microprocessor currently available commercially.

The comments made by the department of mathematics, university of Cambridge, were in the context of the continuing research programme being carried out by the electronics division, DRA, RSRE Malvern and related to the rigour of the mathematical proof process. To date, no errors have been found in the VIPER design.

My Department remains convinced that VIPER represents the best currently available microprocessor design for use in both civil and defence safety critical applications. If, however, any question about responsibility for damage, injury or death were to arise, it would be dealt with in the light of the relevant legal considerations.

VIPER is not currently used in any safety-critical computer systems controlled by MOD. Further comment at this stage would be inappropriate in view of current legal proceedings.

The Gulf (Equipment and Units)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the complete list of equipment and units deployed to the Gulf after 2 August 1990, including territorial and reserve forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of the units and major equipments deployed to the Gulf are being collated and will be published in the statement on the defence estimates and the United Kingdom joint commander's despatch.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to make a decision about the Chieftain replacement programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 19 March at column *90*.

Civil Service Appeal Board

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *272*, what was the date on which representatives of his Department were in private communication with the Civil Service Appeal Board; and whether this communication was written or oral.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my letter of 13 September 1990 to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall), a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Dockyards (Refitting)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *271*, if he will make a statement on the nature of the information about his Department's expected refitting programme that has been provided to the management companies of Rosyth and Devonport dockyards.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The nature of the information provided by the Ministry of Defence to the management companies at Devonport and Rosyth in respect of their core programmes is a commercially confidential matter.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many type 23 frigates have been ordered from *(a)* Yarrow Shipbuilders and *(b)* Swan Hunter Shipbuilders.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Six type 23 frigates have been ordered from Yarrow Shipbuilders and four from Swan Hunter Shipbuilders.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he envisages placing any more orders for type 23 frigates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have nothing to add to my answer to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on 20 February at column *192*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the approximate dates on which he envisages accepting the nine type 23 frigates currently on order into service.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Following the acceptance of HMS Marlborough on 7 March and HMS Argyll on 17 April 1991, there are now seven type 23 frigates on order. We expect all the remaining ships to enter service by the end of 1994.

Equipment Programmes

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will provide details of the effect that the temporary bar on new commitments that he described in the debate of 18 June 1990, *Official Report*, column 688, has had on the equipment programmes listed on pages 37, 39, 40 and 41 of volume 1 of the "Statement of Defence Estimates 1990".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The temporary bar on new commitments was carefully managed to ensure that major equipment projects suffered no significant adverse effect.

Defence Contractors

47. **Mr. O'Neill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which of the defence contractors listed on page 15 of volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1990" he has discussed the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Carlisle: Discussions between Ministers and defence contractors are conducted on a confidential basis.

Calcutt Inquiry

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *272*, what was the amount of fees payable in connection with the Calcutt inquiry; and whether these fees are in addition to the compensation payment of £30,000 to Mr. Colin Wallace.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The sum of £30,000 paid in compensation to Mr. Wallace did not include legal costs. The sum paid to Mr. Wallace's solicitors is commercially confidential, as are the costs of Mr. Calcutt's work on behalf of the Department.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the impact of the "Options for Change" study on service morale.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The need for the "Options for Change" study is well understood within the services.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what studies have taken place into the possible amalgamation of regiments as part of the "Options for Change" process;

(2) what consideration has been given to *(a)* disbanding regiments and *(b)* converting regiments from Regular to Territorial status as part of the "Options for Change" study;

(3) whether he is making an assessment of permanently stationing regiments at particular locations as part of the "Options for Change" study;

(4) whether any consideration of posting individual service personnel from regiment to regiment is taking place as part of the "Options for Change" study;

(5) whether he is reassessing the system of moving complete regiments to different locations as part of the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We continue to study these and other matters as part of our work on "Options for Change"; but, as we have made clear on previous occasions, it is our intention to retain the regimental system.

Dockyard Employees (Pensions)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees at Rosyth and Devonport are currently contributing to Government-established pension schemes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In common with all other civil servants other than those who choose to make private arrangements, MOD employees at Rosyth and Devonport are covered by the principal civil service pension scheme. This is non-contributory except for a deduction of 1½ per cent. of pay in respect of the spouses'/dependants' benefits element of the scheme.

Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which shipyards have won orders for auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels; whether he has plans to order more auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Harland and Wolff, and Swan Hunter Shipbuilders each have an order for one auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel. We expect to order further vessels, but no decisions have yet been made on the size and timing of such orders.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list the current number of BAOR infantry battalions and armoured regiments that constitute a BAOR division.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In peacetime, BAOR has three armoured divisions, the composition of each of which is as follows:

1 Armoured Division—5 armoured regiments and 5 infantry battalions
3 Armoured Division—4 armoured regiments and 5 infantry battalions
4 Armoured Divisions—4 armoured regiments and 6 infantry battalions

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has made any detailed decisions about the future of individual BAOR units or their locations as part of the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 24 January 1991 at column *319-20*. No other decisions have been taken.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications he has had with his Dutch and Belgian counterparts regarding the future roles of the BAOR.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has been involved in regular meetings with his ministerial colleagues from the other NATO countries, including the Netherlands and Belgium, when discussions have taken place on a range of issues including the future roles of allied forces in Europe.

Belgium

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assurances he has had from his Belgian counterpart regarding the supply of defence equipment and material for British armed forces in the event of a crisis.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Belgium provided valuable assistance in the form of medical and logistic support to the coalition (including British) forces during the recent crisis in the Gulf. As a member of the NATO alliance, Belgium is committed, like other members, to the concept

of collective defence. We have not sought any assurance from the Belgians about possible support for British forces in the event of a future crisis outside the NATO area.

Type 42 Destroyers

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to order a replacement for the type 42 destroyer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Following withdrawal from NFR90, we have been considering the way forward for an anti-air warfare frigate to replace the type 42 from around the turn of the century. We hope to make an announcement on the next stage of this programme in the next few months.

HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the lives of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) on 20 May at column *391* to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed).

Lynx Helicopters

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to *(a)* replace Royal Navy Lynx helicopters or *(b)* extend the lives of Royal Navy Lynx helicopters.

Mr. Carlisle: Royal Navy Lynx helicopters will be deployed on Royal Navy ships into the next century. A range of improvements is being introduced to sustain their capability during the remainder of their operational lives.

General Service Respirator

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the speed of the delivery programme for the general service respirator S10 has been changed in the past six months.

Mr. Carlisle: Contract deliveries of S10 respirator facepieces were increased in the last quarter of 1990 to support Gulf deployment requirements. Deliveries have now returned to the normal rate.

Equipment Programmes

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will provide details of the effect that the "Options for Change" study has had on the equipment programmes listed on pages 37, 39, 40 and 41 of volume 1 of the "Statement of Defence Estimates 1990".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not yet in a position to add to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 4 December 1990 at column 161 and by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 19 December at column *212*.

Thailand (Service Personnel)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the allowances payable to those British service personnel working in Thailand who are not attached to the British embassy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Entitlement to allowances and liability for charges for service personnel serving abroad depend on the location and the nature of the duties being carried out and vary in accordance with individual circumstances.

Staff Training College, Dhaka

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Brimanetish armed forces are presently seconded to the staff training college, Dhaka, Bangladesh; and what is the nature of their secondment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The two-man British military advisory team in Bangladesh assists with military staff courses for all three services at the Bangladesh defence services command and staff college.

Low Flying

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards arming aircraft in low-flying exercises with live ammunition.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Our policy remains as set out in the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) gave the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 25 April 1990 at col. *208*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the categories of live ammunition and weapons recovered from the wreckage of aircraft that have crashed in low-flying exercises in Britain in the past four years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No aircraft armed with live ammunition have crashed in low-flying exercises in Britain in the past four years. However, practice bombs using small spotting charges and practice ammunition are carried frequently. Some of the aircraft involved in accidents while low flying were carrying practice munitions.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any planes carrying or armed with live ammunition have crashed in Wales in the past three years from *(a)* low-flying exercises and *(b)* other flying exercises.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any live ammunition has been recovered from the wreckage of aircraft which have crashed in low-flying exercises in the Brecon and Radnor constituency.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Open Policy Documents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all open policy documents published by his Department since 1980; and what plans he has to publish further open policy documents.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The principal document published by the Ministry of Defence which sets out defence policy is the annual statement on the defence estimates. In addition, the Department makes available a wide range of material dealing with policy issues, ranging from discussion papers to press releases. It would be

impractical to provide a list of all such materials published since 1980. The Ministry plans to continue its practice of issuing policy documents as appropriate.

Defence Research Agency Videos

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the video shown by the Defence Research Agency at the defence components and equipment exhibition in Birmingham on 14 and 15 May, cost to make; how many copies are available for distribution; how much it costs to hire the video; and whether it is available to foreign military authorities on request.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the Defence Research Agency, Mr. Nigel Hughes, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Scottish Power (Submarine Incident)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about incidents involving a submarine and the boat Scottish Power between midnight on 18 May and 3 am on 19 May; if he will conduct an inquiry into the allegation by the skipper of Scottish Power that a submarine buzzed the vessel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The skipper of the yacht reported to the Clyde coastguard that between 2300 on 18 May and 0100 19 May, he had sighted lights close to his vessel on three occasions. In the final instance he reported that he also saw the conning tower of a surfaced submarine approximately half a mile away. Submarine movements at the time of this incident have been fully reviewed and I can confirm that there were no Royal Navy or NATO submarines within 60 miles of the location of the reported sighting.

Cambodia

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the military training given to those military forces in Cambodia that are fighting against the Government of that country and are not part of the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullins) on 30 October 1990 at c. 864.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the effectiveness of those military forces in Cambodia that are fighting against the Government of that country and are not part of the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no reliable information about the effectiveness of such forces.

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what income Scottish Homes received in capital receipts from house sales in the fourth quarter of 1990-91 and in the first quarter of 1991-92, from *(a)* right to buy sales, *(b)* rents to mortgage sales, *(c)* sales under the portable discount scheme and *(d)* vacant possession sales.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for the fourth quarter of 1990-91 financial year is set out in the table. Details for the first quarter of 1991-92 are not yet available.

	£ million
Right to buy sales	9·041
Rent to mortgage sales	0·129
Portable discount scheme	0·191
Vacant possession sales	1·032
Total	10·393

The figures include receipts from miscellaneous items, such as building insurance and repair funds. Figures net of these items are not currently available for each type of sale.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish Homes (ex-SSHA) dwellings were modernised in each calendar year, and in each financial year from 1979 to the nearest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is available on a financial year basis only and is as follows:

Number of houses comprehensively modernised

Financial year[1]	*Number*
1975-76 to 1981-82	8,422
1982-83	1,074
1983-84	1,122
1984-85	1,180
1985-86	1,246
1986-87	733
1987-88	1,223
1988-89	733
1989-90	[2]811

[1] Figures for individual financial years not readily available.
[2] Includes 278 units which were improved in estate based strategy areas.

Local Museums

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by how much expenditure on local museums has increased since 1979, both in terms of Government grant-in-aid and expenditure by local authorities.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Government support for local museums is channelled through the Scottish Museums Council, which works to improve the quality of local museums and gallery provision in Scotland. The council's grant-in-aid from Government has increased from £145,000 in 1979-80 to £665,000 in 1991-92, an increase in real terms of 98 per cent. Information on local authorities' expenditure on museums was not available separately until 1983-84. However, expenditure on museums and libraries has increased from £27·8 million in 1979-80 to £93·8 million in 1991-92, an increase in real terms of 46 per cent. On museums alone the increase in expenditure from 1983-84 to 1991-92 is 24·1 per cent. in real terms.

Prison Catering

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the sum per prisoner, per day allocated for catering at Her Majesty's prison, Perth.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cost of food for prisoners is determined by the weekly ration sheet based on an approved dietary scale. On that basis the average daily cost of food per prisoner in Her Majesty's prison, Perth is £1·15.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the standard of food provided to prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Perth.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Prison dietary scales are designed to ensure that all prisoners are given balanced, nutritional and varied meals. The catering arrangements for prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Perth are of a satisfactory and acceptable standard.

Govan Initiative

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current year's budget for Govan Initiative; and what proportion of its funding comes from central and local government.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The total urban programme budget for Govan Initiative in the current year amounts to £795,254. Central Government grant meets 75 per cent. of the cost, with the balance being provided by local government.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if in the nursery schools to be provided by Govan Initiative the system for entry will be similar to the priority system operated by Strathclyde regional council.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There will be some similarity with the system operated by Strathclyde regional council. However, to meet the objectives set in the application for funding under the urban programme, first priority will be given to the provision of child care resources to parents undertaking full-time training or education whose objective is to gain or return to employment.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received a request for additional funding from Govan Initiative.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In response to an approach for additional funding, approval under the urban programme was given on 2 May 1991 to additional expenditure of £18,184 to meet increased capital costs relating to the provision of child care units in the area of the Govan Initiative.

Locate in Scotland

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the budget for Locate in Scotland's activities in each year since 1986-87, at 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The cost of running Locate in Scotland from 1986-87 to 1991-92, taking account of salaries, administration expenses, travel, marketing and advertising is shown in cash terms and at constant 1991-92 prices in the table. The 1991-92 figures are provisional at this stage.

Year	*Cash* £ million	*1991-92 price base* £ million
1986-87	3·8	5·2
1987-88	3·9	5·0
1988-89	4·0	4·9
1989-90	4·3	4·9
1990-91	4·6	4·9
1991-92	5·1	5·1

Forth Valley Health Board

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assistance will be given to Forth Valley health board by way of additional investment and so on, to develop laboratory services, including virology within the board's area;

(2) what consideration is being given to the rationalisation of laboratories at Falkirk royal infirmary and Stirling royal infirmary on one site; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether Forth Valley health board will be free to contract out laboratory work currently carried out at Falkirk royal infirmary to other health boards; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what discussions have taken place with privately owned hospitals regarding the future placement of laboratory work currently carried out at Falkirk royal infirmary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Capital investment in laboratory services is a matter for the health board to consider in the context of its capital plan. Some £200,000 has been spent recently on improvements at Falkirk and district, and Stirling royal infirmaries. No proposals are being considered at present by the health board for rationalisation of the facilities on one site or to contract out laboratory work to other health boards. The improvements in the respective laboratories will enable the board to carry out a wider range of tests in the existing premises.

There have been no discussions with privately owned hospitals about the future placement of laboratory work currently being carried out at the Falkirk and district royal infirmary.

Audubon Bird Manuscripts

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will purchase Edinburgh university's Audubon bird manuscripts and first editions and return them to the university on permanent loan.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No.

Assisted Places

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the income scale which will apply to the assisted places scheme in Scotland in school session 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: For school session 1991-92, I propose to lay regulations before the House in due course providing for progressive parental contributions for one assisted pupil in relation to family income as follows:

Part of relevant income to which the specified percentage applies	Parental contribution (percentage)
That part (if any) which exceeds £8,821 but does not exceed £9,591	9·0
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,591 but does not exceed £10,375	12·0
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,375 but does not exceed £11,930	15·0
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,930 but does not exceed £14,321	21·0
That part (if any) which exceeds £14,321 but does not exceed £17,442	24·0
That part (if any) which exceeds £17,442	33·0

The relevant income scale is open-ended, but the remission can of course be given only where the parental contribution is less than the school tuition fee.

Postgraduate Grants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many grants have been given for postgraduate qualifications in Scotland in each year since 1979, and for what qualifications in each year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

Overall figures for the number of awards offered to Scottish domiciled students in respect of vocational postgraduate and certain other second courses during each academic year from 1978-79 to 1987-88 are set out in table 1.

Information on the breakdown of vocational postgraduate awards by broad subject area for each year since 1988-89, which has been compiled from a different source, is set out in table 2. Similar information for earlier years is not available.

Table 1

	Number
1978-79	3,085
1979-80	3,521
1980-81	3,211
1981-82	2,943
1982-83	2,853
1983-84	2,785
1984-85	2,627
1985-86	2,739
1986-87	2,892
1987-88	2,787

Table 2

	1988-89	1989-90	[1]1990-91
Legal qualifications	380	390	431
Secretarial studies	90	87	21
Art and design	92	107	114
Business studies	248	286	288
Accountancy	109	101	90
Information technology	334	353	501
Social work	141	159	[1]
Ministry	25	28	27
Librarianship	54	76	66
Engineering and technology	91	88	85
Teacher training	858	876	1,391
Others	281	288	253
	2,703	2,839	3,267

[1] Responsibility transferred to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what amount of grant for capital expenditure has been paid to the Grampian health board in respect of Aberdeen royal infirmary in each year since 1979;

(2) what applications he has received from Grampian health board for grants in respect of capital expenditure at Aberdeen royal infirmary for each year from 1987 to 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 May 1991]:* Each year, health boards submit capital expenditure plans detailing their known proposals for the next 10 years. Funding for capital projects is provided by means of an annual capital allocation to each board related to these plans. Boards have considerable freedom to deploy the sums allocated in accordance with their own priorities. Only in certain circumstances are sums earmarked for specific projects (at present mainly for projects costing more than £5 million in total and prior to 1987 for projects included in boards' major building programmes). From 1979-80 to 1990-91 no sums were earmarked within Grampian health board's capital allocations for expenditure on Aberdeen royal infirmary. Expenditure on minor projects was drawn from the main block allocated to the board.

On 10 May I announced that I had given approval for the first phase of a major development at the infirmary. This phase of the development will cost £7·3 million and will provide 30 additional general surgery day patient beds, 30 additional in-patient surgical and gynaecology beds and 41 in-patient ophthalmology beds. In 1991-92, £1·676 million has been specifically earmarked in Grampian health board's capital allocation to fund the start of the development and further provision will be included in the allocations for later years to facilitate its completion. Sums included in the board's capital plans for expenditure on the infirmary during the period 1987 to 1994 were:

	£ million
1987-88	0·669
1988-89	0·585
1989-90	0·623
1990-91	0·829
1991-92	1·676
1992-93	4·357
1993-94	2·303

Audiology

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the number of full and part-time physical measurement technicians in audiology employed by each health board currently and for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the number of qualified physical measurement technicians in audiology in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 May 1991]:* The available information regarding the number of qualified physiological measurement technicians working in audiology in Scotland is shown in the following table.

Audiological technicians by health board and whole-time/part-time at 30 September 1990

	Whole-time	Part-time
Argyll and Clyde	6	2
Ayrshire	0	1
Borders	3	0
Dumfries	3	0
Fife	0	0
Forth Valley	4	3
Grampian	9	1
Greater Glasgow	18	8
Highland	0	0
Lanarkshire	0	0
Lothian	7	1
Orkney	0	0
Shetland	0	0
Tayside	10	1
Western Isles	0	0
Scotland	60	17

The breakdown of physiological measurement technicians into specialties was not available before 1990. It is for individual health boards to determine, after taking account of the needs of the population in their areas, the number of physiological measurement technicians in audiology they employ.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has held with generators seeking to contract within the non-fossil fuel obligation regarding contract length; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department has frequent and regular contact with generators about non-fossil fuel generation, including contract length. I am confident that the regional electricity companies have the flexibilities they need to be able to offer acceptable contracts to generators wishing to contract within the proposed 1991 NFFO Renewables Order.

Hinkley Point C

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his Department's library a copy of the study on the Hinkley Point C public inquiry, by Crispin Aubrey.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Department's library has on order a book entitled, "Meltdown: the collapse of the nuclear dream", by Crispin Aubrey, which includes a chapter on the Hinkley Point C public inquiry. If the author has produced a further study on the inquiry, a copy will be considered for purchase when details about publication are known.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many times he has had to adjudicate on the propriety of real estate transactions involving estate agents who advised on electricity privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: None. The privatised companies are responsible for commercial transactions pertaining to their property.

Euratom Treaty (Safeguards)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether an application has ever been made to the president of the European Court of Justice under article 81 of chapter VII of the Euratom treaty to ensure safeguards inspections are conducted.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such application has been made in respect of an installation in the United Kingdom.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Newport West of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *435*, what forms of assurance were given by the United Kingdom to the countries of origin of the plutonium reprocessed prior to 1973 that their plutonium was kept separate and segregated from United Kingdom origin plutonium and military plutonium.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such assurances for the reprocessing of civil spent fuel have either been requested or given. It has been the Government's policy since 1986 that civil and non-civil spent fuel should be reprocessed in separate campaigns.

Photovoltaics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any Ministers or officials from his Department, or from the energy technology support unit, will be present at the special workshop on photovoltaics and their physics, technology and applications, to be held in Tripoli in Libya on 15 to 20 June.

Mr. Moynihan: No one from my Department or the energy technology support unit will be attending the workshop in Tripoli.

Oil and Gas Exploration (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest developments relating to the exploration for oil and gas off the Welsh coast, and any guidance given by the Welsh Office to those involved in such work.

Mr. Moynihan: Exploration for oil and gas takes place under licences awarded by my Department. Approvals, consents and guidance associated with these licences are issued by my Department.

Licensees also consult the Ministries of Defence and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Department of Transport for guidance on defence, fishing and navigational matters in the licensed areas, the Nature Conservancy Council for guidance on environmental matters, and, in the case of blocks close to shore, local planning authorities. The Health and Safety Executive is now responsible for monitoring and providing advice on offshore safety.

Evidence of oil and gas has been found in only one block to date. The block concerned, 110/13, lies in the Irish sea and was licensed in 1989. The oil and gas discovered in this block has yet to be appraised.

Offshore Licensing

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is able to announce the results of the 12th and frontier offshore licensing rounds.

Mr. Wakeham: I am now able to inform the House about the offshore oil and gas licences that I propose to award in these two separate rounds.

In the 12th round I received 115 applications for 81 of the 120 blocks on offer; 80 companies were involved. Following careful examination of these applications by my Department, I am now prepared to offer licences for 74 blocks.

The number of applications received was satisfying in itself. In addition, the proportion of blocks applied for was the highest for 10 years and showed that the oil and gas industry maintains its very strong interest in obtaining licences on the United Kingdom continental shelf. The success of the round was confirmed by the quality of the proposals put to us by the successful applicant companies and the exploration which will flow from these awards. This will help ensure that the UKCS remains a major international oil and gas province well into the next century.

The response to the first separate round of licensing for frontier areas was also very encouraging. I received 13 applications from groups involving 37 companies for six of the 11 tranches of blocks on offer. I am pleased to be able to offer licences for all these tranches. This will give a fresh impetus to exploration in these areas.

The success of these two rounds demonstrates that the present form of licensing continues to offer the most effective means of releasing offshore acreage to the industry for exploration. The frontier round result especially also highlights the responsiveness of the licensing system to the particular circumstances of different areas. Both rounds demonstrate the importance my Department attaches to listening to the views of the oil and gas industry.

For licences awarded in both rounds, special conditions will apply wherever appropriate to ensure that operations are carried out with due regard to the environment and to fishing, navigation, defence and other interests. These conditions are tailored specifically to the particular circumstances of individual blocks and were agreed with the organisations consulted during preparations for the licensing rounds.

A copy of the list of awards has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Financial Services

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on Government policy on multi-tied agencies, as outlined by the Securities and Investments Board;

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to modify the rules of best advice, as embodied in the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Redwood: The Securities and Investments Board's current retail regulation review includes the present best advice and polarisation regime. The SIB review is at an early stage, but I understand the possibility of multi-tied agencies is one of the issues to be considered.

I look forward to there being a lively public debate on retail regulation. I hope that my hon. Friend and others will send their views to the SIB and let me know of their concerns.

Clothing Industry

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he proposes to take to assist the clothing manufacturing industry in the Blyth Valley constituency.

Mr. Lilley: Companies in Blyth Valley can take advantage of a range of existing schemes including regional selective assistance—a negotiable incentive to investment which can contribute to the capital costs of a project—and subsidised consultancy under the enterprise initiative.

BAT Industries plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the original BAT accounts for 1990 were lodged at Companies house; and if any queries were raised with the company about those accounts;

(2) whether he will investigate BAT's revision of its 1990 accounts and ask the Institute of Chartered Accountants to investigate the effectiveness of the initial audit.

Mr. Redwood: I am pleased to note the prompt action taken by BAT Industries plc in voluntarily issuing a supplementary note under new section 245(1) of the Companies Act 1985, to correct an error in a note to the 1990 accounts which I understand are due to be laid before its shareholders in general meeting on 29 May. The accounts in question have not yet been delivered to the Registrar of Companies.

Disciplinary Cases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish an up-to-date list of the disciplinary cases which, following the publication of inspectors' reports, he has asked the Institute of Chartered Accountants to investigate.

Mr. Redwood: The following seven inspectors' reports have been passed to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. Of these reports, five were disclosed to the institute under the provisions of section 449(1) (1) of the Companies Act 1985 prior to their publication. I understand that the first three reports have been passed to the joint disciplinary scheme. The remaining four are under consideration by the institute itself.

Milbury plc
Westminster Property Group Limited
Minet Holdings plc
WMD Underwriting Agencies Limited
Alexander Howden Holdings plc
The Greenbank Trust plc
Aldermanbury Trust plc
Sound Diffusion plc
The Animal Defence Society Limited

Accountancy Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the president of any of the accountancy bodies applying for the recognised supervisory body status is directly elected by its membership.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that the presidents of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland are directly elected by the membership.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether, as a condition of recognition as a recognised supervisory body, he will make it his policy to require the applicants annually to state the number of their council members who are not directly elected by the membership;

(2) whether he will make it his policy as a condition of recognition to require the accountancy bodies seeking the status of a qualifying body to ensure that its students will be required to learn at least one other European language;

(3) whether he will make it his policy as a condition of recognition as a recognised supervisory body to require the applicants to annually publish the number of complaints which they receive against their members.

Mr. Redwood: Under the Companies Act 1989, the Secretary of State has no power to refuse recognition on these grounds.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will place in the Library a copy of the investigative and disciplinary arrangements offered by the applicants for the recognised supervisory body status.

Mr. Redwood: A copy of each application, which includes details of the applicant's arrangements for the investigation and disciplining of its members, has already been placed in the Library (Official Report, 19 December 1990, col. *187*).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to propose legislation under which the standards of accountancy firms criticised in the inspectors' reports would be independently investigated.

Mr. Redwood: Part II of the Companies Act 1989 will introduce an effective system for monitoring and investigating professional standards.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the council of any of the applicants for the proposed recognised supervisory bodies is not entirely elected by its membership.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that the councils of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and the Association of Authorised Public Accountants may have co-opted members, although the power to appoint them has not been exercised in every case. Most of their councils are elected. The council of the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants is wholly elected by the membership.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any of the accountancy bodies applying for the recognised supervisory body status encourage their members to give proxy votes for council elections to its president.

Mr. Redwood: So far as I am aware, none.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the deadline by which any member of the public may object to the granting of recognised supervisory body status to any of the applicants.

Mr. Redwood: The Department will consider representations made at any time. However, I asked that comments on the applications reach the Department by 15 May (*Official Report*, 18 April, column *222*).

Auditors (Disqualification)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether at any time since 1979 his Department has asked the Institute of Chartered Accountants to disqualify any individual from acting as an auditor.

Mr. Redwood: It is for the professional bodies to determine, in accordance with their disciplinary procedures, whether a member who is the subject of a complaint referred by my Department should lose his authorisation to audit company accounts. I would of course take appropriate action if there were reason to question the way the bodies exercised their responsibilities.

Audit Qualifications

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate the trend in going concern audit qualifications.

Mr. Redwood: The auditor's considerations in respect of whether a company is a going concern may be an issue which the auditing practices board will wish to address.

Auditors (Disclaimers)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to investigate the disclaimers of opinion issued by auditors.

Mr. Redwood: My Department and the financial reporting review panel as appropriate are always willing to consider instances where it is alleged that a company's accounts do not comply with the statutory requirements.

Hallmarking

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to defend the action brought by J. Kohle GMBH & Co. KG against him, the British Hallmarking Council, and the Goldsmiths Company, challenging the basis of United Kingdom hallmarking of precious metals.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is considering the legal position. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have made clear their view that the compulsory marking of precious metals is essential to protect the interests of the consumer and honest trader. The Government believe that this is best achieved through the United Kingdom hallmarking system.

Coppernob Ltd.

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set up an inquiry under the Companies Act 1985 into the activities of Coppernob Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I shall be replying soon to the hon. Member's letter of 14 May about the company.

United Kingdom Production

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if he will publish figures showing the percentage of total United Kingdom production of *(a)* coal, *(b)* steel and *(c)* tinplate which has been produced in Wales.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information for 1990 is as follows:

Percentage of total United Kingdom production produced in Wales

Commodity	*Per cent.*
Coal[1]	6·5
Crude steel[2]	31·2
Tinplate[2]	100·0

Sources:
[1] Department of Energy: figures relate to all deep-mined and opencast coal, financial year 1990-91.
[2] Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Salesmen (Representations)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the effectiveness of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 in protecting limited companies from rental misrepresentations by salesmen leasing or selling fax machines and photocopiers.

Mr. Redwood: Limited companies that lease equipment or buy equipment under a credit agreement are not covered by the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to ensure that leasing companies are made fully responsible for the representations made by salesmen acting on their behalf who are not employed by the leasing company.

Mr. Redwood: Consideration is being given to proposals that the rights of lessees should be extended in the circumstances provided.

Environmental Management

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been received to date for support under *(a)* the environmental management options scheme, *(b)* the environmental technology innovation scheme and *(c)* the Euro-environ programme; and if he will indicate the sectors of industry from which applications have been received to date.

Mr. Lilley: I am pleased to say that, as at 1 May 1991 my Department has received 229 applications under the environmental management options scheme: 59 involving United Kingdom companies under the Euro-environ scheme and 170 under the environmental technology innovation scheme which is a joint DTI/DOE scheme. Applications have been received from over 20 different product sectors with some covering more than one sector, such as soil remediation, waste and water treatment, chemicals and domestic waste.

Petroleum Coke

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answers to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *118*, what progress his Department has made in evaluating the hazards of petroleum coke used in domestic appliances and in discussing with the suppliers the instructions for use of this fuel in domestic appliances.

Mr. Lilley: My Department has found some evidence of problems when petroleum coke has been used in closed appliances or has not been blended before use. There is little evidence of problems experienced by consumers when the fuel is pre-blended and used only in open-grate fires. Such precautions form the basis of our recommendations to suppliers to provide instructions for consumers. The suppliers have undertaken to provide clear instructions on the safe use of this fuel.

Director General of Telecommunications (Report)

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has yet received a report by the Director General of Telecommunications for the year 1990, as required under section 55 of the Telecommunications Act 1984.

Mr. Lilley: Yes. The seventh report by the Director General of Telecommunications is being published today. It covers the period 1 January to 31 December 1990. Copies of the report have been laid before each House of Parliament.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he plans to strengthen export controls aimed at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government are committed to intensifying efforts to prevent proliferation in view of the heightened international concern. In the light of this, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to extend controls to the remaining 13 precursors of concern identified by the Australia Group, in common with other member countries, in order to ensure the effectiveness of multilateral export controls. It has also been decided to extend the general end-use control which was introduced in December last year in the light of concerns relating to chemical and biological weapons, to cover materials and equipment of concern for nuclear weapons and missile purposes.

Exporters (Advice Services)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any proposals for the improvement of information and advice services to United Kingdom exporters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* The Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office overseas trade services provide a wide range of information and advice to United Kingdom exporters. We have made substantial improvements in our services over the past two years and our regular quality monitoring system reports high levels of satisfaction among our business customers.

We keep our services constantly under review. The joint directorate, formed on 2 April this year by merging the export service management units of the DTI and the FCO, has as its priority task to ensure that our export services operate well throughout the world. The fact that some 90 per cent. of our customers say that they will use our services again demonstrates their value and quality.

Mr. Mohinder Singh Bedi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications have been (i) granted and (ii) refused since 1984 for financial assistance available to small businesses from *(a)* Mr. Mohinder Paul Singh Bedi, *(b)* West Middlesex Immigration Services Ltd., *(c)* Swordshine Ltd. and *(d)* Hammersmith Securities Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* This Department does not reveal details of applications for support. These are confidential between the company and the Department. There is no trace of any financial assistance to these companies.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary off State for Employment if he will list, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for the latest available period, the number and proportion of ET trainees who three weeks after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience provider, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* in a part-time job, *(d)* in full-time education or on a training course, *(e)* employed in their own business, *(f)* in job clubs, *(g)* in voluntary work, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit and (i) unemployed and not claiming benefit.

Mr. Jackson: The destinations of trainees leaving employment training between December 1989 and November 1990, three months after leaving, are shown in the following table. Percentages only are provided, because not all trainees respond to the follow-up survey.

Employment training
Destination of trainees 3 months after leaving in period December 1989 to November 1990

Per cent.

	Full-time Job Work Exp. Employer	*Other Employer*	*Part-time Job*	*Full-time Education/ training*	*Self-Employed*	*Jobclub*	*Voluntary Work*	*Unemployed Claiming Benefit*	*Unemployed Not Claiming Benefit*	*Something Else*
South East	8	17	12	2	6	3	3	35	8	5
London	6	14	6	4	7	5	3	44	7	4
South West	9	15	8	2	11	4	4	36	6	4
West Midlands	9	15	8	3	2	4	4	46	5	4
East Midlands and Anglia	8	15	8	3	5	5	4	43	6	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	9	16	7	2	7	4	3	44	4	4
North West	9	16	7	2	7	5	3	44	5	4
Northern	10	15	6	2	3	5	3	48	5	3
Wales	8	14	7	2	9	4	3	42	6	4
Scotland	10	14	5	3	4	4	3	48	4	3
Great Britain[1]	8	15	7	3	5	5	3	45	5	4

Source: Employment Training Follow-up Survey.
Percentages may not total 100 due to independent rounding.
[1] Includes some trainees with nationally contracted training providers.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, the number and proportion of employment training leavers who obtained a vocational qualification.

Mr. Jackson: The following table gives the percentage of trainees leaving employment training between October 1989 and September 1990, the latest date for which information is available, who obtained a qualification or credit or who were awaiting results. Numbers of trainees achieving qualifications or credits towards qualifications are not available, because not all trainees respond to the follow-up survey.

Employment training
Proportion gaining qualifications or credits
All leavers between October 1989 to September 1990

Region	*Obtained qualification or credit*	*Awaiting results*
	Percentage	*Percentage*
South East	28	4
London	20	4
South West	27	5
West Midlands	23	5
East Midlands and Anglia	24	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	23	4
North West	22	4
Northern	28	5
Wales	26	4
Scotland	27	5
Great Britain[1]	25	4

Source: Employment Training Follow up Survey.
[1] Includes some trainees with nationally contracted training providers.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for the latest available date, the amounts paid to *(a)* ET providers and *(b)* YT providers in the form of ex-gratia payments to compensate them for hardship caused by recontracting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: In the 1990-91 financial year, my Department operated a special ex-gratia compensation scheme for ET providers. Where a contract with a training provider was foreclosed or modified substantially, reducing contracted volumes or recruitment earlier than the last effective day of the contract, my Department undertook to make an ex-gratia payment. There was no similar arrangement for youth training.

The table shows the provisional outturn expenditure to end March 1991 under the special employment training ex-gratia payments arrangements.

Region	*Amount* £
South East	97,000
London	74,000
South West	166,000
West Midlands	190,000
East Midlands and Eastern	Nil
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,000
North West	102,000
Northern	262,000
Wales	56,000
Scotland	47,000
National providers	302,000
TOTAL	1,315,000

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of employment training trainees who were being paid their training allowance and/or training premium by the Employment Service in each month since April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is provided in the following table. I am glad that employment training continues to help so many unemployed people in their efforts to find employment.

Employment training trainees receiving employment training allowances—May 1990 to April 1991

	Number
May 1990	202,795
June	194,459
July	187,196
August	180,916
September	179,955
October	185,988
November	190,041
December	194,045
January 1991	189,109
February	198,413
March	192,279
April	167,427

Source: Employment Service records.

Employment Service

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress the Employment Service has made in meeting its targets outlined in the 1990-91 agency agreement; and if he will show for the latest possible date *(a)* total unemployed job placings and variance from target, *(b)* long-term unemployed job placings and variance from target, *(c)* people with disabilities job placings and variance from target, *(d)* inner-city job placings and variance from target, *(e)* number of claims not pursued following initial contact and variance from profiled annual reference level, *(f)* number of claimants moved from unemployment benefit to another benefit and variance from annual reference level and *(g)* number of people who withdrew their claim to benefit after contact with fraud investigators and variance from annual reference level.

Mr. Jackson: I am informed by the chief executive of the Employment Service that for the period April 1990 to March 1991, the agency's performance against target was as follows:

	Performance Achieved 1990-91	*Variance from target/ reference level*
		Per cent.
Total value of correct payments of unemployment benefit (target of 95 per cent.)	95·7 per cent.	[1]+0·7
Percentage of new claims input to computer within six days of a claim being made (target 91 per cent.)	86·8 per cent.	−4·2
Claims not pursued following initial contact	448,000	+12
Claimants moved to an appropriate benefit other than unemployment benefit	78,400	−2
Number of people who withdrew their claim after having contact with fraud investigators	64,700	−14
Unemployed job placings	1,396,900	−15
Long-term unemployed job placings	208,100	−24
People with disabilities job placings	34,200	−20
Inner city job placings	471,000	−9

[1] The Employment Service 1990-91 Annual Performance Agreement represents this target as the total value of incorrect payments. The figure used here is an inversion of this.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the establishment of the Employment Service executive agency; what is the annual salary for each employee; and what savings his Department will make in connection with this agency.

Mr. Jackson: The employees of the Employment Service are civil servants and as such receive salaries appropriate to their particular grade. The table shows the numbers employed in each grade and the minimum and maximum points of each salary scale.

A total of £13·6 million, or 2·3 per cent., of running costs savings were achieved in the first year of operation as an agency—1990-91.

Grade	*Number in grade*	*Minimum of salary scale (£)*	*Maximum of salary scale (£)*
Grade 3	2·0	47,090	54,720
Grade 4	7·0	40,116	43,307
Grade 5	16·0	32,551	36,997
Grade 6	24·0	24,997	32,551
Grade 7	157·6	21,905	26,121
Senior Executive Officer (SEO)	364·4	15,156	19,348
Higher Executive Officer (HEO)	2,013·7	12,367	15,786
HEO (D)	1·3	14,141	17,789
Executive Officer (EO)	9,791·7	7,286	12,621
Management Trainee	16·0	8,931	13,145
Administrative Officer	21,492·0	4,561	9,278
Administrative Assistant	3,130·6	4,121	7,574
Senior Personal Secretary	7·0	10,623	12,162
Personal Secretary	41·1	7,834	9,598
Typing Manager	8·9	10,988	12,580
Typist	256·4	5,977	7,834
Support Grade Band 1	134·2	8,345	8,862
Support Grade Band 2	194·9	4,438	7,942
Graphics—Technical Grade	6·0	9,348	12,704
Senior Instructional Officer	30·0	16,441	17,125
Higher Instructional Officer	57·0	14,552	15,468
Instructional Officer 1	216·0	13,145	13,691
Senior Economic Assistant	3·0	14,141	17,789
Economic Assistant	1·0	11,117	13,100
Senior Information Officer	1·0	15,553	20,467
Accountant (Grade 7)	1·0	23,407	26,121
Accountant (SEO)	2·0	17,125	21,862
Accountant (EO)	1·0	9,302	14,851
Auditor (SEO)	8·0	15,786	20,152
Auditor (HEO)	19·0	12,880	16,441
Senior Assistant Statistician	1·0	14,141	17,789
Assistant Statistician	2·0	11,117	13,100
Senior Research Officer (Social Science)	5·2	13,821	18,925
Research Officer (Social Science)	4·1	9,348	13,821
Senior Psychologist	26·0	16,822	20,467
Higher Psychologist	4·0	13,262	16,176
Psychologist	62·0	11,026	12,143
Physiotherapist	3·5	13,465	15,385
Chief Nursing Consultant	1·0	31,158	33,939
Nursing Consultant	4·0	25,004	26,835
Senior Social Worker	1·0	16,822	21,287
Higher Social Worker	3·0	13,262	16,822
Social Worker	27·5	9,348	14,381
Hostel Manager	2·0	13,466	17,831
Hostel Steward	2·0	8,236	9,725
Hostel Orderly	3·5	5,599	5,891
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	1·0	12,704	16,822
Support Manager Grade 3	1·0	9,438	11,222
Industrials	25·0	6,755	9,509
TOTAL	38,182·6		

Note: People employed in London in many of these grades may progress beyond the maximum of the National scales shown above. They also receive an additional London Weighting allowance.
Virtually all our employees are covered by nationally negotiated Performance Pay Agreements which, subject to set criteria, allow additional pay to be earned.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the total staff of the Employment Service executive agency are on secondment from Government Departments and, in particular, from his Department.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Disabled Employees

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the take-up figures of disabled persons into employment under the quota scheme operated by public sector employers for each of the years 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Jackson: As with all questions on Employment Service operational matters, I have referred this question to Mike Fodgen, the executive agency's chief executive, for reply. A copy of that response will be placed in the Library.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of permits issued

exempting employers from the quota obligations under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 for each of the past five years.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment Rehabilitation Centres

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total amount spent on employment rehabilitation centres for each of the past five years, in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the allocated budget of each of the operational TECs for 1991-92, showing the amounts contracted for *(a)* youth training, *(b)* employment training and *(c)* the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Budgets for 1991-92 have been allocated by funding block rather than individual scheme. The allocated budgets for each of the 76 operational TECs for funding blocks 1 to 3 are set out in the table.

	Funding block 1 £ million	*Funding block 2 £ million*	*Funding block 3 £ million*
South East			
Essex	14·999	5·835	3·320
Hampshire	19·665	4·800	2·690
Heart of England	5·718	1·483	1·200
Hertfordshire	10·601	2·877	2·385
Isle of Wight	1·941	0·577	0·515
Kent	19·015	5·338	3·180
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	3·358	1·012	0·705
Surrey	6·715	1·746	1·680
Sussex	13·864	4·636	3·380
Thames Valley Enterprise	11·183	2·314	1·870
London			
AZTEC	3·390	4·360	1·430
LETEC	10·050	17·750	2·700
SOLOTEC	6·870	7·170	1·940
STTEC[1]	5·070	15·460	3·510
South West			
Avon	14·918	12·030	3·491
Devon and Cornwall	29·581	20·254	6·070
Dorset	8·148	3·921	3·921
Gloucester	7·395	3·568	1·600
Somerset	7·350	2·754	1·530
Wiltshire	7·385	2·936	1·540
West Midlands			
Birmingham	20·713	28·101	4·107
Central England	5·861	4·936	1·382
Coventry	13·939	10·918	2·588
Dudley	5·904	6·169	1·041
Hereford and Worcester	5·347	4·130	1·177
Sandwell	5·650	6·261	1·041
Shropshire	7·568	5·912	1·557
Staffordshire	21·250	12·381	2·898
Walsall	4·530	6·268	0·887
Wolverhampton	6·143	6·819	1·041
E. Midlands and Anglia			
Leicester	13·715	4·184	2·695
Northants	5·460	2·714	1·415
Lincolnshire	10·867	3·329	1·808
Greater Nottingham	10·719	4·549	1·965
North Nottinghamshire	7·900	5·516	1·430
South Derby	8·889	3·539	1·799
North Derby	6·165	2·238	1·114
Norfolk/Waverney	11·446	4·493	2·213
Suffolk	8·777	1·582	1·294
Bedfordshire	5·920	1·767	0·895
GP TEC	4·005	1·533	0·568
CAMBSTEC	3·010	0·476	0·749
Yorkshire and Humberside			
Leeds	10·097	20·492	2·273
North Yorshire	8·091	7·201	2·047
Bradford	9·558	9·315	1·673
Calderdale and Kirklees	9·362	10·460	2·056
Wakefield	6·281	6·077	1·054
Barnsley and Doncaster	12·783	13·867	2·165
Sheffield	10·148	14·455	2·492
Rotherham	5·852	6·266	0·984
North West			
Bolton/Bury	6·200	4·802	1·555
CEWTEC	9·778	13·633	2·443
Cumbria	10·100	6·863	1·596
ELTEC	8·650	6·000	1·759
LAWTEC	11·935	10·838	2·764
Manchester	16·070	19·007	4·506
Merseyside[2]	25·618	30·925	4·480
METROTEC	4·901	4·346	1·043
NORMID[2]	7·950	6·117	1·357
Oldham	4·306	3·218	0·795
QUALITEC	4·976	4·163	0·608
Rochdale	2·700	3·961	0·775
South and East Cheshire	5·510	2·422	1·088
Stockport HP	4·670	3·668	1·528
Northern			
Teesside	16·012	11·391	2·557
Tyneside	22·027	13·350	3·750
Wearside	10·219	6·998	1·385
Durham	16·782	10·517	2·662
Northumberland	9·325	3·352	1·486
Wales			
Gwent	9·368	5·232	1·655
North East Wales	7·012	3·333	1·384
North West Wales	6·978	3·120	1·631
Mid Glamorgan	11·135	5·727	1·719
Powys	2·029	1·101	0·590
South Glamorgan	6·007	4·380	1·461
West Wales	15·455	8·877	3·490

[1] Becomes operational 27 May 1991.
[2] Becomes operational 24 June 1991.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to require that each training and enterprise council includes representatives of small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 22 May 1991]:* The TEC prospectus stated that the private sector directors on training and enterprise councils should broadly reflect the mix of commerce and industry in their area and should include executives with first-hand experience of running small businesses as well as major employers. More generally, TECs are required to take account of the needs of small firms in their plans to bring about a dynamic and prosperous local economy.

Disabled People (Special Schemes)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications have been made, and how many grants have been awarded, for each of the past five years for *(a)* the personal reader service scheme, *(b)* the special aids to employment scheme, *(c)* the assistance with fares to work scheme and *(d)* the adaptations to premises and equipment scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment Statistics (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of total employment by industry and what was the percentage change in employment by industry, by year for the period 1979 to 1990 and 1991 to date, for the Doncaster area classified by: men, women, young persons and ethnic minorities.

Mr. Jackson: Information for employees in employment according to industry by district and by travel-to-work area is available only from the censuses of employment for 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. This can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Separate data for young persons and ethnic minorities are not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has of the number of people employed in *(a)* coal mining and *(b)* manufacturing in the Doncaster travel-to-work area; what percentage these are of the total employed; and what the comparable figures were in 1979.

Mr. Jackson: Information for employees in employment by travel-to-work area is available only from the periodic censuses of employment. The earliest and most recent estimates are from censuses taken in 1981 and 1989 and are given in the table.

Employees in employment in coal mining and manufacturing in the Doncaster travel-to-work area

	September 1981		*September 1989*	
	Number (000's)	*Proportion[1] (per cent.)*	*Number (000's)*	*Proportion[1] (per cent.)*
Deep coal mines	16·4	17·8	6·0	6·9
Manufacturing	25·3	27·5	19·9	22·8

[1]Employees in Activity Heading 1113 (deep coal mines) and Divisions 2 to 4 (manufacturing industries) of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980, as a percentage of all employees in the travel-to-work area.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the levels of redundancies, by industry, in the Doncaster area by year for the period 1979 to 1990 and 1991 to date, classified by men, women, young persons and ethnic minorities.

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of redundancies confirmed as having occurred is given in the tables. Data are available for Doncaster only for the period 1983 to date. Data given for 1979-82 are for the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Information is not available to identify separately men, women, young persons and ethnic minorities. I refer the hon. Gentleman to an article on official statistics on redundancies that appeared in the September 1990 edition of *Employment Gazette*.

Confirmed redundancies in Yorkshire and Humberside region (1979-83) and Doncaster area (1983)—SIC 1968

	Yorkshire and Humberside region					*Doncaster*
	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1983*
1. Agriculture, Forest and Fish	0	136	26	63	103	0
2. Mining and Quarrying	220	191	1,237	1,477	4,246	632
3. Food, Drink and Tobacco	1,633	2,310	2,227	2,691	1,724	207
4. Coal and Petrol Products	0	126	962	106	151	0
5. Chemicals and Allied	173	1,486	2,588	711	714	0
6. Metal Manufacture	1,736	9,130	14,405	6,796	5,841	62
7. Mechanical Engineering	2,805	4,717	6,660	6,240	5,299	317
8. Instrument Engineering	27	256	358	123	111	0
9 Electrical Engineering	173	1,931	2,058	893	799	114
10. Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering	342	120	198	85	326	17
11. Vehicles	36	3,129	4,018	3,601	1,988	601
12. Metal Goods (N.E.S.)	700	3,856	5,316	2,714	2,971	187
13. Textiles	3,114	9,254	4,348	5,883	2,484	232
14. Leather and Fur etc.	773	16	180	137	63	0
15. Clothing and Footwear	1,436	2,904	3,374	2,780	499	0
16. Bricks, Pottery, etc.	896	2,430	1,515	981	1,924	201
17. Timber, Furniture, etc.	405	992	1,251	1,452	644	0
18. Paper, Printing, etc.	321	407	1,356	595	785	185
19. Other Manufacturing Industries	269	949	745	687	603	70
20. Construction	1,130	2,967	3,460	759	1,073	37
21. Gas, Electricity, Water	0	9	50	527	427	15
22. Transport and Communication	358	831	1,577	1,030	885	119
23. Distributive Trades	1,018	1,680	2,583	2,826	2,111	27
24. Insurance, Banking, etc.	41	83	248	300	98	0
25. Professional and Scientific Services	0	72	215	497	446	99
26. Miscellaneous Services	198	512	1,729	1,586	1,228	11
27. Public Administration, Defence	34	385	418	417	264	59
Total	17,838	50,879	63,102	45,957	37,807	3,192

Confirmed redundancies in the Doncaster area 1984-90

SIC 1980 *Industry*	*SIC*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Agriculture	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Energy and water	1	188	5,181	1,117	1,008	278	271	0
Extraction of minerals	2	138	191	62	10	512	25	0
Metal goods	3	36	406	335	1,145	262	386	69
Other manufacturers	4	280	124	387	195	0	77	14
Construction	5	9	57	166	0	14	60	10
Distributive trades	6	56	152	138	104	53	18	0
Transport and communications	7	140	0	18	18	29	0	29
Insurance, banking etc.	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other services	9	0	0	25	0	22	0	52
Total		847	6,111	2,248	2,480	1,170	837	174

Confirmed redundancies in the Doncaster area 1991

Industry	*SIC*	*January*	*February*	*March*[1]	*April*[1]
Agriculture	0	0	0	0	0
Energy and water	1	0	0	0	0
Extraction of minerals	2	0	298	0	0
Metal goods	3	22	18	0	0
Other manufacturers	4	72	0	0	0
Construction	5	0	0	0	0
Distributive trades	6	0	0	22	0
Transport and communications	7	0	0	0	0
Insurance, banking etc.	8	0	0	0	0
Other services	9	0	0	29	0
Total		94	316	51	0

[1] Provisional and subject to revision.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has, by year, on the number of individuals covered by the redundant mineworkers payments scheme who have left the Doncaster travel-to-work area unemployment register since the commencement of the scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number and percentages of *(a)* male unemployed and *(b)* female unemployed in the Doncaster area as at 1 April in each year from 1979 to 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The available information, for the Doncaster travel-to-work area, can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of persons employed by sex in each standard category of employment in the Doncaster area for 1 April in each year from 1979 to 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Information for employees in employment according to industry by district and by travel-to-work area is available only from the censuses of employment held in September of 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. This can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Wages Councils

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers in the northern region and in each county within the region are covered by the various wages councils; how many have had their individual pay or conditions checked by the councils; and in how many cases underpayments were discovered.

Mr. Forth: There are no statistics of the total numbers of workers covered by wages councils in the northern region or in counties. The following table gives information about workers in each wages council industry in the northern division of the wages inspectorate whose pay was checked in 1990 and the numbers found to have been underpaid.

Wages council	*Number of workers whose pay was checked*	*Number of workers found to be underpaid*
Aerated waters	32	0
Clothing	291	14
General waste reclamation	126	4
Hairdressing undertakings	584	49
Retail (non-food) trades	2,078	123
Retail food and allied trades	2,445	404
Licensed non-residential establishments	3,625	280
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	1,177	113
Unlicensed place of refreshment	399	49
All other councils	83	5
Totals	10,808	1,040

Ionising Radiation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the common dose limits and radiation protection standards applied to those who work with ionising radiation in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) each of the other European Community countries.

Mr. Forth: Common dose limits and radiation protection standards for work with ionising radiation apply throughout the European Community and are set out in European Community directive 80/836/Euratom (as amended by 84/467/Euratom). The United Kingdom legislation that implements the European Community directive is the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 and the mirror Northern Ireland provisions, copies of which are held in the Library.

A comprehensive picture of how member states have met their obligations under the directive is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Employment-related Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each employment-related agency *(a)* those that have published their business plans for 1991-92 and *(b)* those that have not yet published them.

Mr. Jackson: The only executive agency within my Department is the Employment Service; its operational plan for 1991-92 was placed in the Library of the House on 9 May.

Careers Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of responses about the future of the careers service has supported its retention under local education authority control.

Mr. Jackson: I will write to the hon. Member.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list showing the latest available figures for the rate of unemployment in each OECD member country.

Mr. Jackson: Following is a table which gives the latest available internationally comparable unemployment rates for the OECD countries.

Comparisons of unemployment between OECD countries

	Standardised unemployment rates[2] *seasonally adjusted*	
	Percentage rate	*Latest month*
Spain	15·8	November
Ireland	15·1	March
Canada	10·4	March
Italy	9·8	October
New Zealand	9·6	February
France	9·2	February
Australia	9·1	March
United Kingdom	8·6	March
Belgium	8·5	March
Netherlands	7·5	February
United States	6·8	March
Finland	5·7	February
Norway	5·0	November
Germany (FR)[1]	4·5	February
Portugal	4·5	November
Sweden	2·3	March
Japan	2·0	February
OECD Total[2]	6·6	February
Major 7[3]	6·1	February

Source: OECD "Main Economic Indicators" and Press Releases.

[1] There are no reliable figures available as yet for a unified Germany. The rate quoted is for what was formerly West Germany.

[2] Only the countries listed are included in the total.

[3] United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, USA, Japan and Canada.

Piper Alpha

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the number of victims of the Piper Alpha disaster who are still awaiting settlement of compensation claims against their employers.

Mr. Forth: Compensation payments are a matter between Occidental and the survivors or the families of victims.

Paint

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to promote water-based paint products in the construction industry as a replacement for solvent-based products.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive has produced industry-specific guidance including two leaflets, "Health Hazards to Painters" and "Solvents and You", setting out the risks attached to work with solvents and outlining the control and preventive measures to be taken. Exposure to solvents can be minimised by the use of low-solvent or solvent-free materials. However, such products may contain other toxic substances and employers must therefore assess the relative health risk of alternative products available.

Service Industries (North-East)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the variations in the rate of increase of the number of jobs created in the service industries in the regions of the north-east in the past two years.

Mr. Jackson: The latest estimates of employment for area within standard regions relate to the 1989 census of employment. More recent estimates of changes in the number of employees in service industries in the north standard region—Cumbria, Cleveland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Northumberland—are as follows:

Employees in the service industries in the North Region

	Actual change (thousands)	*Percentage change*
1989		
March	6·0	0·9
June	−3·2	−0·5
September	8·2	1·2
December	14·7	2·1
1990		
March	−3·9	−0·5
June	−2·5	−0·3
September	1·4	0·2
December	7·9	1·1

Careers Services

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about his proposals to encourage local authorities and training

and enterprise councils to work in partnership to oversee the operation of careers services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Prior to the White Paper on "Education and Training for the 21st Century" (Cm 1536), I received a very wide response to my consultative document on the future of the careers service. Many of those responding supported LEAs and TECs working closely together. As announced in the White Paper we shall support LEAs and TECs which wish to work together, and we propose to legislate to open up options for the management of the careers service.

Licensed Mines

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions against licensed mines proprietors were brought by Her Majesty's mines inspectorate in 1990-91.

Mr. Forth: As a result of informations laid by the Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate, there was one prosecution of a licensed mine proprietor in 1990-91.

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many licensed mines were inspected in 1990-91 by Her Majesty's mines inspectorate; and if he will publish a list of each mine inspected.

Mr. Forth: In the 12-month period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991 a total of 150 licensed mines were inspected.

Following is a list of the mines inspected:

Licensed mines that have been inspected in 1990-91

South western

Abbey
Alltwen Hill
Blaencuffin
Blaengrennig No. 2
Blaenpergwm
Blaentillery No. 2
Blaentwina Drift
Bodyst Uchaf
Brawds Level
Bryndulais No. 2
Brynglas
Bush New Level
Brynant Varteg
Bwich
Caeglas Level
Cannop Drift
Cannop Engine
Carn Cornel No. 2
Cefn Mawr No. 2
Craig-y-Pant
Crugau
Crugau No. 2
Cwm Glo
Cwm yr Onnen
Danygraig No. 3
Darrell
Dinas Rock
Dynant Fach No. 1
Dynant Fach No. 2
Elwyn
Evanwill
Ffroch-y-Garran
Ffynonau Duon No. 4
Ffynonau Duon No. 2
Ffynonau Duon No. 2
Ffynonau Duon No. 3
Forest No. 3
Garnwern
Glanderi
Gleison
Glen
Glo Mynydd
Graig-y-Fforest No. 2
Graig-y-Llyn
Graigddu No. 2
Gwynfryn No. 2
Hamblin Gale
Hayners Bailey
Heol Hen
High Street
Hirfynydd
Hopewell in Wimberry
Ivy Rock No. 3
Ivyrock No. 2
Little Cwm
Llechart No. 2
Lleti Philip No. 3
Lyn
March Hywel No. 2
Morses Level
Nant Gwrhyd No. 2
Nant Merddog
Nantmelyn
Nant-y-Cafn
Nant-y-Glo
Nant-y-Mynydd No. 2
Nantglas Newydd
Nanthir
Nantmelyn No. 2
New Parc
New Penrhiw
Oak
Old Park No. 2
Old Unemployed
Pantygasseg
Pantygasseg No. 3
Parc Level
Pentwyn No. 3
Penywaun No. 2
Ponty
Reddings Level No. 2
Rhaeadr No. 2
Rheola
Rithan
Sarn Helen
Scranton
Tai Level Lo
Tan-y-Garn
Tyn-y-Graig
Tyn-y-Wern
Upper-Rha-Bryn-Oer
Venallt
Waunhir No. 2
Wem Tarw No. 2
Winstone
Ystrad Anthracite

Western

Acres Nook
Apedale 1-4
Apedale 5-6
Apedale 7-8
Bank Top No. 2
Castle
Coed Talon M2
Draycott Cross
Haying Wood No. 2
Hulme Mine
Little Sheriff
Parklands No. 5
Podmore Hall
Quaker House

North Midlands

Amber Valley Mine
Doe Lea Mine
Moorside Mine

North Yorkshire
Hay Royds Mine
Mainband Mine
Green Clough Mine

Scotland
Ayle East Drift Mine
Backshot Mine
Barhaugh Mine
Barras Hill Mine
Blagill Mine
Blenkinsop Castle Mine
Clrghyll Drift Mine
Craigman Mine
Drovers Drift
Eldon Drift
Falstone Mine
Falstone No. 2 Mine
Glenview Mine
Greenland Drift Mine
Harviestoun Mine
Lassodie No. 2 Mine
Lonnen Drift Mine
Middridge Drift Mine
Osmond Croft Mine
Park Drift Mine
Rashiehill Mine
Saline Mine
Shadfen Park Drift
Smithy Dene Mine
Tows Bank Drift Mine
Viaduct 'A'
Viaduct 'B'
Whittle Mine
Woodside Drift Mine
Woody Close Drift Mine
Wrytree Farm Drift Mine

Wem Tarw Mine

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will institute a public inquiry into the fatality which occurred at the Wem Tarw licensed mine on 21 May.

Mr. Forth: No. The Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate is currently investigating the accident and will take any necessary consequential action.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 191**

SESSION 1990–91

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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